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**A STUDY OF OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS IN EAST GERMANY:
IMPACTS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY
DURING 1953 AND 1989**

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**A STUDY OF OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS IN EAST GERMANY:
IMPACTS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY
DURING 1953 AND 1989**

by

SHAWN DARYL PEDERSON, B.S.

THESIS

**Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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April 1993

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I

Introduction to Part I

History books are filled with accounts of popular uprisings of the masses against their government. All too often these accounts prove to be short sighted in their perspective, and consequently they do not look past the obvious facts to the heart of the sentiments driving the uprising. The first half of this study seeks to examine the East German uprising of June 1953 in an attempt to shed long overdue light on the historical and political significance of this early occurrence in the annals of communist Germany as it relates to world history, and in particular, the course of the Cold War. This study further focuses keenly on the anemic nature of the American foreign policy response to this uprising, and the possible roles these actions played in dictating the ultimate fate of the East German riots of 1953.

With the end of the Second World War, European diplomatic navigation revolved around two distinct points. The first, reinforced by the hostile relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States, focused on a policy of "negotiation from strength" and became a western obsession under containment policy, while a second goal was repeatedly declared to be the reunification of Germany. With the beginning of the Eisenhower Administration and the Republican agenda, the world was led to believe that the US was going to play a greater role in the liberation of those oppressed by communism. An examination of

the facts will show these claims are suspect and reunification was not high on the priority list of the maturing Cold War international agenda.

Every era has its share of historical myths. Some of these are more historical, some more mythological than others. The events of June 17, 1953 have taken on decidedly mythical characteristics in both the western and eastern conscience. In official western and eastern versions alike, June 17 shows itself to be a reflection of uncertain political policies in uncertain political times. The eastern version paints the uprising as the work of putative neo-Nazis, unreconstructed bourgeois elements, and strong western provocation. Meanwhile the western version is equally unspecific and records June 17 as merely a general and popular uprising whose merits will never be known because of the brutal and ruthless Soviet intervention which crushed the uprising. Sadly symbolic of a whole age of German history, and a telling indication of the net effect of June 17 on the Cold War, is the manner in which Berlin's Siegesallee (Victory Avenue), renamed the Street of June 17, has led from August 13, 1961 until November 1989, to a dead end at the wall before the Brandenburg Gate.

The legacy of the East German uprising of June 17, 1953 ". . . reads like John Reed in reverse, not the story of *Ten Days That Shook the World*, but of a day and a half that didn't."¹ To understand this is to better understand the nature of

¹ Arnulf Baring, *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953*, trans. Gerald Onn (London: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. xvii. Baring's work is widely regarded as one of the most objective, accurate and informed sources on the uprising. His research, although not published worldwide until 1972, was conducted as part of a master's essay started in the mid-fifties and completed in

civil unrest, uprising, and revolution and the reasons why these movements fail or succeed. I shall begin by addressing the specifics of the uprising. This will be followed by an examination of American foreign policy with respect to the uprising. From these endeavors it is hoped that a greater appreciation may be gained for the display of human courage shown by the East German opposition on June 17, 1953.

1965. Baring's work proves to be much more objective in relating the events of the uprising than many of the other German written reports I have found which were predictably written by FRG citizens sympathizing with, and concerned for, relatives and friends living in the GDR.

II

Prelude to an Uprising

The civil unrest of June 17, 1953 was short lived and by most accounts was suppressed just as quickly as it erupted. An examination of the events leading up to June 17 shows that perhaps the riots were not so spontaneous, and in many cases were even predictable. It is particularly difficult to do anything more than hypothesize about the impacts of events prior to June 17 on many of the key leaders of the uprising. This is due to the realities of the Stalinist system which predictably silenced, in one form or another, the key players who stimulated the masses to action. Despite the hindrance caused by this lack of original sources, it is still possible to derive, from what is available to even the unprivileged researcher, a fairly clear understanding of how events prior to June 17 conspired to bring about the uprising.

The Second Party Conference

The post war leadership of eastern Germany was dominated by Soviet influence from the outset. The communist leadership, dominated by Walter Ulbricht, was an imported Soviet control group with the purpose of revitalizing the KPD (German Communist Party). The legalization of all anti-fascist political parties and mass organizations such as trade unions, under the auspices of an "Anti-

Fascist Democratic Order" was a move specifically designed to calm western fears concerning communist influence. Ulbricht made this clear in a statement explaining the new political set-up ". . . must look democratic, but we [KPD] must have complete control."²

The year 1946 saw the formation of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) , the product of a merger of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the KPD. In this unison the KPD enlisted the talents and support of an SPD section leader named Otto Grotewohl to merge the two party organizations without the permission of the SPD leadership. This move allowed the KPD Soviet influence to remain prominent within the new unified party, and the SED to form an essential monopoly on political power. For his efforts in this case, Grotewohl was awarded the top post in the new SED. The Anti-Fascist Democratic Order later gave way to the formation of the National Front, and subsequently the founding of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on October 7, 1949.³

The Second Party Conference of the SED was held in Berlin from July 9 to 12, 1952. This conference had a profound impact on the following year. In May

²Bruce Allen, *Germany East: Dissent and Opposition* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991), p. 20. The influence of these groups of groomed Soviet Stalinist leaders, commonly referred to as "Muscovites", can not be overstated. Their influence can be seen in the formation of indoctrination programs and the establishment of the ruling elite in nearly every Eastern Bloc postwar government. Bruce Allen, with the help of groups such as Across Frontiers, Labor Focus on Eastern Europe, and the END Journal staff has compiled a great amount of previously unseen primary source documents that were unavailable until German reunification.

³Bruce Allen, p. 20.

1952, the German Agreement with the Western Powers was signed and effectively removed the classification of "occupation" from the forces that remained on German lands. In an attempt to formalize the course to be taken in Eastern Germany, the SED used the Second Party Conference as an opportunity for Walter Ulbricht to announce plans for the "establishment of socialism." The conference passed a resolution stating that ". . . the political and economic conditions and the attitude of the working class and of the majority of the workers . . . had progressed to a point where the establishment of socialism had become the fundamental task [facing the state]."⁴ As far as the economy was concerned, this meant an accelerated push to develop heavy industry and especially a drive to collectivize agriculture. With respect to the GDR in general this signaled a conclusion of the occupation for reparation policies the Soviets had been pursuing in the early postwar years, and a concerted effort to proceed with the socialist plans of creating a people's democracy.⁵

The directives of the Second Party Conference involved the formation of the first agricultural and craftsmen's collectives. The first five-year plan for the GDR (1951-1955) followed Marxist theory of production and was concerned primarily with the establishment of heavy industry. With these concentrated internal efforts came measures to limit external influences from the West. These measures

⁴*Documente der SED*, Vol. IV, pp. 73. as cited in Baring p. 3.

⁵Baring, p. 3.

included the designation of what was formerly the zonal frontier, as a national frontier and the restriction of travel and communication. Out of this arose the Berlin Blockade and the increased anxiety that this brought for the communist government. Soviet concerns about the intensification of the Cold War, coupled with the realities of the Soviet-Yugoslav split stimulated the presence of ever more Stalinist orthodoxy in SED directives, and the rise of active persecution of what were deemed to be "disruptive elements" of the society. These disruptive elements included anyone suspected of spying, youth who had joined the activist Young Christian Association, and many priests accused of criminal activities. "Thousands of entrepreneurs, manufacturers and farmers were arrested on suspicion of tax evasion, condemned by the courts, and stripped of their possessions."⁶ All of these actions served to further alienate the former SPD leaders now within the SED. By 1950 there were almost no former social democrats remaining in the ruling Politburo. It is hardly surprising, considering these counterproductive actions, that the GDR would face severe economic hardships by the end of 1952.

Toward the end of 1952, the GDR government's investment in the creation of heavy industry caused exports to lag far behind imports. Coupled with this problem was the expense created by ever increasing worker's wages in an attempt to speed up completion of the mills and factories under construction. However, these high wages did not prove to be the only pressure on the economy. The

⁶Baring, p. 5.

government found it necessary to ". . . spend 'considerable, unexpected sums' on the formation and fitting out of the paramilitary People's Police to counter the 'aggressive military preparations' then being made against the GDR." The GDR government saw the formation of the People's Police, and the bridging of the gap between wages and productivity as the primary goals for 1953. The SED leadership felt that the workers had been unnecessarily excluded from the resolutions taken in the Second Party Conference, and the time to reverse this "conciliatory " line had come.⁷ In forming the new collective agreements, the government desire was to bind individually and collectively, the workers to either increase their output or to achieve the production target laid down by the state ahead of schedule. These collective agreements were formed by the government ministries in conjunction with the Free German Trade Unions (FDGB). This action caused the FDGB to be viewed unfavorably by the workers as an instrument of the state. The workers were faced with no reliable union to represent them in the face of more strict government increases in workloads not matched by financial gains.⁸ It was inevitable that the level of worker dissent would rise.

The death of Stalin on March 5, 1953 paved the way for reform and resistance due to combined, accumulating pressures from within the East German society as well as from the Soviet Union, where a post-Stalin power struggle was

⁷Baring, pp. 7-8.

⁸East German Reporter Editors, "DDR Reply to the Prague Appeal", *East European Reporter* Vol. 1 No. 3, Winter 1989/90, p. 37.

taking place. The internal struggle involved a challenge to Ulbricht's leadership by fellow Politburo members Wilhelm Zaiser, the minister of State Security, and Rudolph Herrnstadt, the editor of the party newspaper *Neues Deutschland*. These men, calling for a program of sweeping reform along revisionist lines, met their demise because they did not have the party mechanisms for drumming up popular support. They also committed the tactical error of aligning themselves with a man named Lavrentii Beria, the loser of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) power struggle. The only policy directives the Soviet Union was able to provide while dealing with its own internal problems, came on April 15 and suggested the SED adopt a softer line towards the working class and its demands. SED leadership was crippled by this lack of direction coming out of Moscow, and subsequently reacted weakly and slowly in the face of mounting civil as well as internal party dissent.⁹ As small strikes began to be seen in the spring of 1953 in such places as Eisleben, Finsterwalde, Furstenwalde, Chemnitz-Borna and other towns it became clear that the government-worker relationship was on very unstable terms.

Increased Quotas: More Fuel for the Fire

As mentioned earlier, the SED/FDGB partnership had several important goals with respect to the workers. These goals included "higher quotas" and "strict

⁹Bruce Allen, pp. 25-27.

economy." The true object of the campaign, as reported in *Die Tägliche Rundschau*, the mouthpiece of the Soviet occupation forces, was to ". . . effect a rise in the work quotas, which would lead either to increased productivity or to lower production costs in the state-run industries and would therefore mean a reduction in state expenditure."¹⁰ If the higher quotas did not result in higher productivity, then wages could be brought back in line with productivity and state expenditure could be reduced in this way also. These requests for quota increases were to be fulfilled voluntarily by the workers, who upon hearing the government requests from their union boss would naturally understand the needs behind the increases and immediately endeavor to fulfill them. It was soon realized that this would not be the case. *Die Einheit*, the theoretical party magazine, reported as late as May 1953 ". . . that in many places die-hard attitudes prevailed and that in the course of the preceding twelve months the number of technically based quotas in use had actually decreased."¹¹ This is not surprising if it is realized that the only way in which certain groups of workers could ensure even a moderate livelihood was by overfilling low quotas in an attempt to earn a higher wage. This view was held by many workers in low-paid simple jobs that had been excluded from earlier pay increases because their particular skill was seen as less important in the building of socialism.

¹⁰Werner Wolf, *Die Tägliche Rundschau*, March 26, 1953.

¹¹Baring, p. 16.

At this point the GDR began to feel the effects of the mass exodus of citizens to the West, a critical topic whose discussion has been saved for discussion at this point. The principle reason why the demand for higher quotas met with such determined resistance was the shortage of food which had become particularly acute from the Autumn of 1952 onward. The harvests of that year had fallen far below expectations. The returns were evidently so low, that none were ever published or made record of, as is typical of struggling communist governments. "The bad harvest was partly due to a combination of spring frosts and a wet autumn, but in particular to the exodus of several thousand farmers."¹² These farmers were leaving because of the extreme tax burden, seemingly impossible quotas, and because many were still opposed to the socialist trappings of the agricultural cooperative. In 1951 a total of 4,343 farmers fled to the West. This figure rose to 14,141 in 1952 as part of 182,000 citizens fleeing to the West. Of the 225,000 people who left in the first half of 1953, no fewer than 37,296 farmers voted for the increased quotas "with their feet." The result of all this is shown in the fact that by the end of 1952 ". . . some 300,000 acres, roughly 13 per cent of the agricultural land in the GDR, had been abandoned in this way and subsequently taken over by the state." A true food shortage was being realized in the GDR, and

¹²Baring, p. 17.

these problems were compounded by the growing needs of a People's Police force who were given preferential treatment and access to government food stockpiles.¹³

The Soviet response to the increasingly desperate situation unfolding in the GDR was to support an even more relaxed "new line". This new line promised the GDR what material and financial support the Soviet Union could spare, and indicated that the CPSU believed the continued GDR preoccupation with Stalinist disruptive elements no longer should be a primary expenditure of GDR resources. On April 16, 1953, General Secretary Ulbricht politely paid tribute to the CPSU advice but called for greater vigilance in the uncovering of ". . . sabotage, arson and espionage," to which he continued to attribute all current difficulties. In the thirteenth session of the Central Committee of the SED on May 14, the question of mandatory quota raises, in the face of failing voluntary action, was formally addressed. It was decided that all ministers and secretaries of state should be instructed to take ". . . all necessary steps to remedy the abuses in the sphere of work quotas at normal level and to raise those of crucial importance to [national] production by an average of at least 10 per cent before June 1, 1953."¹⁴ It is important to note that this resolution was only passed by the Central Committee and not by the Council of Ministers who did not look at it for another two weeks. When the Council of Ministers finally acted on the resolution they changed the date

¹³Stefan Brant, *The East German Rising* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), pp. 138-144.

¹⁴"Über die Erhöhung der Arbeitsproduktivität und die Durchführung strengster Sparsamkeit" in *Dokumente der SED*, Vol. IV, p. 410 ff.

for the quotas to be raised to June 30, 1953 in hopes that this day, which was also Ulbricht's sixtieth birthday, would serve as a day to celebrate socialism and brotherhood among the workers who would surely ". . . recognize that present-day work norms in general impede progress" and see the new quotas as a means for friendly competition.¹⁵ They would soon find out that one month, which the Council hoped would provide a transition period for the new quotas to be implemented, was also more than enough time for feelings of dissent to mature and seek an outlet.

¹⁵"From the Decision of the Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic on May 28th, 1953, about the Raising of the Work Norms" taken from Stefan Heym, *Five Days in June* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), p. 13. Heym, although he chooses to relate the events of the uprising in novel form with many fictional characters, does present many of the appropriate documents in their entirety, as well as give an interesting insight into the mindset of the workers, many of them he claims to have interviewed in order to accurately create his fictional characters.

III

The Realities of the "New Line"

As the Soviets were making progress with their internal post-Stalinist domestic liberalization, they were beginning to show signs of desiring a relaxation of the costly tension of the Cold War. Within a week of Stalin's death, the Soviets proposed a three-power conference to discuss questions of such diversity as air safety in German air space, concerns over the new United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, renouncement of their territorial claims on Turkey, re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel and Yugoslavia, and armistice negotiations in Korea. All of these initiatives were seen as a sign of great hope in the West, where the possibility of a US-Soviet summit conference was finally being considered. In a speech on April 16, President Eisenhower made statements suggesting the feasibility of détente. This shows that the measures being taken by the Soviets were not going unrecognized in other areas of the world.

On June 9, 1953, the Politburo of the SED showed that it also was also aware of the positive reviews the Soviet actions were receiving. Pertinent sections of the resolution are reproduced below:

*The New Line: The Decision. Communiqué Issued by the Politburo
of the SED on June 9, 1953*

At its session of June 9, 1953 the Politburo of the SED passed a resolution recommending to the government of the GDR that it should implement a series of measures designed to bring about a marked improvement in the standard of living of all sections of the population and to strengthen the legal rights of the individual in the German Democratic Republic. The Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED took the view that both the SED and the government of the German Democratic Republic have committed a series of errors in the past, which have found expression in decrees and directives (such as the decree introducing new regulations for the distribution of ration cards and the decree authorizing the takeover of rundown agricultural holdings), in special census measures, in harsher taxation methods and so on. The interests of certain sections of the population, such as the independent farmers, private business men, craftsmen and intellectuals, were neglected. Moreover, serious errors were committed in the implementation of the above mentioned decreed and regulations in the districts, precincts and towns. One result of this has been that a large number of people have left the republic. . . . The Politburo also recommends that the decrees authorizing the takeover of rundown agricultural holdings should be rescinded and that the practice of appointing managers for failure to fulfill the official quota or for incurring income tax arrears should be discontinued. Those farmers (small, medium and big farmers) who have left their holdings and fled to West Berlin or West Germany because of the difficulties they encountered in running their farms should be given an opportunity of returning to their farms.¹⁶

In addition to this resolution the Politburo stated ". . . quite categorically that it was dedicated to the 'great goal of German reunification.'" On June 11 the resolution appeared in *Das Neues Deutschland* in its entirety without alteration, and the same day the government put into affect all the proposed measures.¹⁷ It would

¹⁶*Dokumente der SED*, Vol. IV, p. 428 ff.

¹⁷Baring , pp. 26-28.

seem from the text of the resolution that the masses would have been at ease about the flurry of recent restrictions the government had imposed. But the fact that this resolution was passed solely by, and accredited to the Politburo, doomed any pacifying effect the resolution might have had to fail. The people of the GDR by 1953 had formed some very basic opinions of the way government power was distributed. Most of the direction from the Soviet Union that the common worker was privy to read, came from the Central Committee of the Soviet Union, not from the SED Politburo. In the case of the June 9 resolution, it is quite possible that some of the uninformed citizens of the GDR simply did not believe the resolution had any true weight being that it was from the Politburo and reflected no action by the Central Committee of the SED. This may have been a contributing factor to the persistence of unrest, but the major factor was that with all its conciliatory language, the resolution did not rescind the increased quotas of the May 14 resolution. It is evident that the Politburo and the Council of Ministers felt the imposition of new quotas was an essential and well thought out policy. It was only this belief, and being completely out of touch with the popular feeling in the country, that could have led them to not even mention--let alone revoke--the May 14 resolution.

The oversight by the SED was recognized by people inside and out of the party leadership. In an article that appeared in *Das Neues Deutschland* (The SED mouthpiece) on June 14, the SED methods by which the increased quotas were

introduced were harshly criticized for their forceful imposition on the workers. At all events on June 15, this article was passed hand to hand by the construction workers of the Stalin-Allee. They were understandably encouraged by the possibility the SED was seeing the error in its ways and would soon rescind the higher quotas. This was proven to be false on the morning of June 16, when an article by Otto Lehmann, a member of the FDGB executive, stated unequivocally in *Die Tribüne* (the union mouthpiece), ". . . that the resolution of May 28 authorizing higher quotas were completely in order, would be retained, and must be put into effect."¹⁸ The expectations of the workers had been trampled one too many times. The fuse was lit and the explosion was certain to follow.

June 16, 1953: The People Will Be Heard

The events of June 16 saw the first true indications of the day that would follow. In this case there were no known prior plans by any workers to carry out the events that would take place in the wake of the Lehmann article. It is known that from late May onward, there had been sporadic work stoppages and instances of unrest on various construction sites, in particular Block 40 on the Stalin-Allee and the new administrative block for the People's Police in Friedrichschain.. These were all resolved without any further flare up. On June 16, the same workers once again voiced their opinion that the new line had simply neglected their concerns.

¹⁸Heym, p. 151.

The workers declared their intention of sending a delegation to meet with the Minister President the following day if the new quotas were withdrawn.¹⁹

Instead of sending this delegation to see Otto Grotewohl, the Stalin-Allee workers decided to go as a unit to the government headquarters building. It is imaginable that this plan was adopted over the original plan in fear that a delegation of only two men would simply be arrested and never heard from again. The workers from the hospital site in Friedrichschain agreed on a similar course of action. Before long there was a procession of angry workers streaming from both sites toward the FDGB building. When the workers discovered that the FDGB was closed, they decided to proceed straight to the House of Ministries. The path of the procession took them through winding city streets where they continually picked up new recruits consisting of more workers and the curious. By the time the procession reached the House of Ministries, its numbers had swollen to an estimated 10,000 incensed citizens. This discontent would grow when the mob found the doors of the building locked and no one named Grotewohl or Ulbricht to be found on which to vent their fury. The government reaction to the worker's actions is one that further illustrates how out of touch with the common worker the GDR leadership proved to be.²⁰

¹⁹Baring, p. 42.

²⁰Allen, pp. 28-30. It is speculated that the government leadership, Ulbricht and Grotewohl in particular, influenced by the advice of other Ministers, did not meet the angry mob because they believed the sheer intimidation of standing in the hallowed precincts of the House of Ministers

Eventually the crowd was greeted by members of Ulbricht's staff. One by one these people were shouted down from the podium by a crowd determined to hear from Ulbricht himself. As the afternoon wore on, the crowd became generally confused about the effect they were having. They felt empowered by the fact they had shouted down the likes of a minister and a professor, but the fact that Grotewohl and Ulbricht had not been seen led the workers to believe that the government simply felt it could out-wait the demonstrators and they would eventually calm down and go home. This confusion gave way to feelings of desperation and destructive behavior. In light of this, a spokesman for the Council of Ministers appeared to tell the workers that the Council had decided to withdraw its decision to increase the work quotas, because it now realized this action had been ". . . quite wrong." The pertinent text of the "Politburo Statement on the Quota Question, June 16, 1953," reads as follows:

As a result of inquiries received from a number of factories and construction sites concerning the question of higher quotas the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED considers it necessary to issue the following statement: 1. If we are to build a new life [for ourselves] and improve the living conditions, not only for the workers, but of the whole population, we can only do so on the basis of higher productivity and increased production. The revival and speedy development of the economy of the German Democratic Republic after the war was made possible only by the realization of our old party slogan: "Produce more--Live better." This was and is the only proper course. . . 2. The Politburo nonetheless considers it quite wrong to effect a 10 per cent increase

coupled by the reception of even the lowest government official would cause the workers to disband with the good feeling they had been noticed by such an esteemed member of the society.

in work quotas in the public sector by administrative order. The raising of the work quotas cannot and must not be implemented by administrative methods but only on the basis of conviction and voluntary cooperation.²¹

This withdrawal of the new quotas was announced to the demonstrators in the streets through the use of loudspeaker vans. By this time the protesters had grown so impatient that they were now calling for the resignation of the government. To many, the withdrawal of the quota increases was no longer enough, and they saw the loudspeaker vans as a medium to better get this message out. Subsequently, several of the loudspeaker vans were commandeered by the workers and the message broadcast that the next day June 17, would be the day for decisive retaliation for the governments inattention. Through the medium of the loudspeaker, far greater numbers of citizens, many of whom were in their homes and not participating in the demonstration, were informed of the decision to organize on June 17. This fact would prove a crucial factor in determining the size of the action taken on June 17, 1953.²²

²¹*Dokumente der SED*, Vol. IV, pp. 432-433, as cited in Baring, p. 15.

²²Baring, p. 49. Baring places particular importance on the ability of the workers to commandeer the loudspeaker van as the most important means of disseminating the strike plans. Heym, pp. 230-252, takes a slightly different viewpoint and gives a great deal of the credit to the RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) broadcasts originating from West Berlin. It is important to recognize both influences, and the latter will be covered in more detail in later discussion.

IV

"In our country the productive forces develop, not as in the anarchical countries of the imperialist world, but in complete harmony and in proper relationship to one another. Our nationalized economy is already showing a constant increase in production and has led to an increase in popular affluence." From a speech by Otto Grotewohl June 10, 1953

June 17, 1953: Noble Cries and Deaf Ears

If it was not obvious to Grotewohl and the GDR government on June 16 that harmony was not the condition within the productive forces, it could not help but be painfully obvious on the morning of June 17, 1953. On June 17 there were strikes and demonstrations in more than 250 towns in the GDR. It is the case for many of these towns, that no actual written or oral accounts of disturbances have been preserved. Therefore, it is impossible in many instances to form an accurate assessment of what actually happened in some areas of the GDR on June 17. In addition to Berlin and the surrounding areas, the centers of revolt were to be found in the industrial areas of central Germany such as Bitterfeld, Halle, Leipzig, and Merseburg. There were reports of "61,000 striking workers in and around East Berlin, 121,000, in the industrial areas of Central Germany, 38,000 in Magdeburg,

24,000 in Jena, 13,000 in Brandenburg and 10,000 in Görlitz."²³ It seems impossible to believe that such exact estimates of the numbers of strikers could be made amid such pandemonium. In searching through various source material discussions of the striker's numbers, one finds they are roughly similar and seem to be based on the number of workers assigned to the plants where work was completely stopped. The official government estimates are much lower because of an apparent desire to disguise the size of the dissent for fear it would be exploited in the West. In light of this tremendous participation in a truly unorganized strike, it is important to explore just who the strikers were, and why the dissent was so widespread.

A Roll Call of the Rising

If one is looking for a class-based label to put on the uprising of June 17, then yes, the uprising could be called a workers revolt. But, if one is to abandon this simple view and examine the interesting and complex demographics of the strikers, it becomes conceivable that the strikes were simply the outgrowth of a much more widespread dissatisfaction with the communist system in the GDR. It was presumably much easier for the authorities to keep a close watch on the activities of the farmers, middle class, and intelligentsia. The numbers of these groups had been severely diminished by exodus to the West, and their place within

²³Baring, p. 55.

the society made it difficult for them to create the same solidarity shared by the workers. As these groups saw their place in society becoming more tenuous as the exodus proceeded, they became much more willing to abide by government wishes in the hope of maintaining some semblance of their former status.²⁴

The predominant group in the June 16-17 strikes was the construction workers. From the first small groups working on the Stalin Allee on June 16, to the more widespread groups in the provinces on June 17, it was the construction workers who made up the bulk of the strikers. Several reasons are proposed for this fact in the accounts of the uprising. Arnulf Baring attributes the unrest in the construction industry to nine factors, five of which hold particular promise: 1. The construction work were seasonal and many of the workers experienced layoffs in the winter months. Many were still bitter from layoffs in the most recent winter or worried about the same in the coming winter. 2. The construction workers, because of the nature of the industry and their tendency to constantly move from one job site to another upon project completion, had never organized their own workers' association. 3. The construction workers were perhaps the healthiest members of the work force and felt sure they could hold their own against anyone attempting to stop their strikes. 4. The construction industry was the last industry to be nationalized. 5. The construction industry had not yet been collectivized. In

²⁴Baring, p. 54. This information comes from a study of the middle class and intelligentsia performed by Professor Hans Köhler entitled *Zur geistigen und seelischen Situation der Menschen in der Sowjetzone* (Bonn, 1952) some twelve months before the June uprising.

the construction of the socialist machine, the construction workers were given tremendous amounts of work to complete. The government housed these workers in primitive huts in remote areas with no opportunity for social life or entertainment. Accepting that the construction workers were the bulk of the strikers, it is important to highlight who, among the workers, emerged as organizers and leaders.

One of the more curious characteristics of the strike committees that were formed was the nature of their leadership. A large percentage of the leaders of these committees proved to be former professional soldiers of the pre-war and wartime Germany. It is understandable that these former soldiers were trained to seek out leadership roles in times of crisis:

Many of the former professional soldiers working in the East German industry after the war were violently opposed to communism in general and the SED regime in particular. . . and many of the members of this group felt that the SED regime, having deprived them of their careers, had added insult to injury by maligning their chosen profession, the denigration of militarism being official SED policy at that time.²⁵

²⁵ This notion of former professional soldier involvement is supported throughout Heym's *Five Days in June* in Heym's relation of the frustration felt by these workers at the lack of governmental respect for their leadership skills based simply on the fact that they are not strong SED party supporters. Similar studies of the composition of the East German work force were conducted by western observers such as Karlheinz Meiler (pseudonym), "Standen die Bürgerlichen abseits? Der 17. Juni soziologisch untersucht" in *Deutsche Monatshefte für Politik und Kultur*, July - August 1962, p. 31. These assertions have been challenged in *Der Spiegel*, No. 15, 1963, p. 30.

In the absence of any reliable and strong union leadership, it is not surprising these former military men were either pressured into, or sought out leadership roles in the insurrection. These strikers were referred to after June 17 in the fifteenth session of the Central Committee as ". . . fascist elements, in other words civil servants and entrepreneurs who lost their privileged positions in 1945 and who still dream of having their old privileges restored."²⁶

Solidarity Across the Land

The solidarity shared by the workers of the GDR was a principal factor lending the fledgling demonstrations their power. Looking at the strike centers, many areas of strong striker turnout were those traditionally thought to be communist districts. This fact shows that the workers, regardless of political orientation, carried a distaste merely as Germans for the GDR regime. We must recall the merger of the SPD and the KPD spoken of earlier. This partnership made it impossible for the citizens to cast a vote for the SPD without also casting a vote for the KPD. With this in mind, the strikers voiced four prominent objectives: 1. The return of wages based on old norms immediately. 2. A lowering of the cost of living. 3. The desire for free and secret elections. 4. The promise of no retribution toward any of the strikers.²⁷

²⁶*Dokumente der SED*, Vol. IV, p. 455.

²⁷Baring, pp. 69-70.

The solidarity shown among worker groups across the GDR was indicative of post-war preferences. The construction workers were some of the few workers whose long standing work groups were not all intentionally or inadvertently broken up by the socialist agenda. The impact of this is seen in the fact that not all construction workers participated in the strikes. Those working in the construction of post-war industries such as the uranium industry, did not participate in the strike. This is due to two factors. The first is that these workers, being assembled to start a new industry, did not share a sense of solidarity with each other, and the rest of the construction workers across the GDR. Secondly, the uranium industries along with others deemed critical to the Cold War, were watched closely by permanent Soviet occupation troops and the People's Police. Any desire to strike was certainly stifled by this fact. The solidarity shared by the workers who did strike contributed greatly to the ". . . remarkable discipline and a marked sense of order . . ." present in the initial informally organized demonstrations.²⁸

The Actions That Were Taken

By and large the events of June 17 were triggered by two factors: the widely heard broadcasts from the loudspeaker vans alluded to earlier, and the greater range of broadcast of the bulletins put out by Radio in the American Sector (RIAS). Additionally the strikers used commandeered railway and trade

²⁸Baring, p. 73.

organization telegraphs to disseminate the news of the events of June 16 and the plans for June 17 to the remote villages of the GDR. The RIAS bulletins were played as often as every half hour on June 16. In a broadcast made at 4:30 P.M. on June 16, the RIAS also referred to the call for a general strike outside the House of Ministers, but this reference was never heard again because American authorities apparently insisted that nothing capable of inciting violence in the GDR should be broadcast.²⁹ The effects of these broadcasts, the 4:30 P.M. broadcast in particular, can never be accurately measured, but common sense would dictate the effect of a widely broadcast, widely listened to radio station would have an extreme impact on people desperate for up to the minute updates on the events in their streets and government.

During the first stage of the demonstrations of June 17, the groups of protesters in the many towns across the GDR very much resembled the homogenous disciplined groups of industrial workers seen in the early stages of events the day before. At this point it is evident that the size of the crowd was not overwhelming the fledgling leadership of the former military men and others. As the crowd swelled to enormous proportions, the peaceful demonstration took on a much more revolutionary nature. In fact, it is probable that many of the citizens joining the large crowd were not fully aware of the purpose of the gathering. But,

²⁹*Der Aufstand der Arbeiterschaft in Ostsektor von Berlin und in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands: Tätigkeitsbericht der Hauptabteilung Politik des Rundfunks in Amerikanischen Sektor in der Zeit vom 16. Juni bis zum 23. Juni 1953.*

as with many spontaneous gatherings there are some who seek to take advantage of the anonymity the large crowd provides. " . . . rioting . . . arson. . . . and lynchings [made the] afternoon a marked contrast to the morning."³⁰ Thus, throughout the day the uprising became more radical and more violent.

In the morning hours of June 17, many of the demonstrators had arrived at government jails and prisons seeking release of many of the workers who were being punished for voicing dissent prior to June 16. From all accounts, these people were admitted by the prison staff who readily agreed to discuss prison records concerning specific individuals. In the afternoon, the unruly demonstrators charged the prisons and demanded the release of all prisoners, indiscriminately releasing many who were true criminals.³¹ Understandably this fact was later used in propaganda against the uprising to characterize the events of June 17 as instigated by criminals. As the day turned to evening, the demonstration began to lose all cohesiveness through the country. When it became evident to all, including the SED and the Soviet troops anxiously watching, that the strikers had no contingency plans for dealing with the disintegration of order in the masses or for continuing the events on the following day, the doorway for crushing the uprising and punishing the instigators was seen to be open.

³⁰Baring, p. 74.

³¹Baring, p. 75.

A Sad End

Although it is obvious in hindsight that the uprising of June 17 was not aimed directly at the Soviets, but rather at the SED and the GDR government, it is certainly conceivable the Soviets saw the workers' actions as an indirect attack on the Soviet leadership in the Eastern Bloc. The Soviet Commandant in East Berlin, Major-General Dibrova, ordered out forces of Soviet tanks, armored cars, and lorry-borne infantry to restore order. In all 267 demonstrators were killed, 1067 wounded. The government suffered as well with 116 party officials and security police killed, 600 wounded. On June 18, the streets of the GDR belonged to the Red Army and the People's Police. However, ". . . strikes persisted, sometimes for weeks with the workers' demands shifting in favor of the release of imprisoned strikers."³² During this period, ". . . 141 persons were summarily tried and shot and a further 14 were later convicted and executed."³³

³²Allen, p. 28.

³³J.K. Sowden, *The German Question 1945-1973* (London: Bradford University Press, 1975), p. 152.

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"Shame on you Athenians . . .for not wishing to understand that in war one must allow oneself to be at the command of events, but to forestall them . . . You make war against Phillip like a barbarian when he wrestles . . . If you hear that Philip has attacked in the Chersonese, you send help there; if he is at Thermopylae, you run there; and if he turns aside you follow him to the right and left, as if you were acting on his orders. Never a fixed plan, never any precautions; you wait for bad news before you act." From Demosthenes address to the Athenians in 351 B.C.

"We must realize that as a nation, everything we say, everything we do, and everything we fail to say or do will have its impact in other lands. It will effect the minds and wills of men and women there." From speech Dwight D. Eisenhower, October 8, 1952.

The Western Influence

At this point the American foreign policy influence on the events surrounding June 17, 1953 deserves some discussion. In researching the rhetoric of the US government concerning the uprising in the GDR, it was shocking to see the sheer volume of legislation recorded concerning the event. It is important to keep

in mind the policies of the Eisenhower Administration were essentially a reaction to the same circumstances faced by their Democratic predecessors, the Truman administration, and in turn a product of Stalin's last years. But, as we shall see, the Eisenhower Administration, from the campaign trail and throughout the Presidency, presented a very different picture to the world compared with Truman's policies of containment.

It is suggested in much of the material dealing with the uprising on June 17, that the workers were subconsciously counting on the West to come to their aid. Hans Köhler, in his study of the attitudes of the GDR citizens toward the uprising, stated, "The workers are prepared to act, the middle classes are not: they are hoping for help from the outside. . . Instead of placing their trust in their own endeavors, they waited in the hope that things would improve, either as a result of a change in the leadership or as a result of western intervention."³⁴ Why was this the case? Examining the campaign rhetoric of the Presidential election of 1952 sheds considerable light on the foundations of a belief by any would-be dissident that the United States would provide significant aid in the struggle for freedom around the world.

³⁴Hans Köhler as cited in Baring, pp. 54-55.

Eisenhower, Dulles and Liberation

During the Presidential election campaign of 1952, the Republicans cleverly exploited the American public's frustration with containment -- a frustration grounded in the popular illusion of national omnipotence. During the campaign, it became evident that the American public had a general feeling of insecurity, a feeling increased by American involvement in the Korean War. Republicans claimed this was due to "blunders" committed by the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. Republican attacks centered on the notion that Democratic leadership ". . . traded our overwhelming victory for a new enemy and for new oppressions and new wars which were quick to come."³⁵ They berated the Democratic containment policy saying, ". . . the present Administration, in seven years, has squandered the unprecedented power and prestige which were ours at the close of World War II. We charge that the leaders of the Administration in power lost the peace so dearly earned by World War II. They profess to be following a defensive policy of 'containment' of Russian communism which has not contained it."³⁶ John Foster Dulles, the chief Republican spokesman on foreign policy issues reiterated the charge that Truman policies were self-defeating in a campaign message saying, "We are not working, sacrificing, and spending in order to be able

³⁵John W. Spanier, *American Foreign Policy Since World War II* (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1960), p. 99.

³⁶Council On Foreign Relations, *Documents on American Foreign Policy, 1952* (New York: Harper, 1953), p. 80.

to live *without* this peril--but to live *with* it, presumably forever. Ours are treadmill policies which, at best, might perhaps keep us in the same place until we drop exhausted."³⁷

Dulles went on to further condemn containment as a negative policy that surrendered the initiative to the enemy. Liberation policy, on the other hand would consistently ensure that the initiative was always at United States disposal. "The aim of American foreign policy," Dulles stressed, ". . . should not be to coexist indefinitely with the Communist menace; it should be to eliminate that menace."³⁸ Dulles then presented some specific proposals which were designed to show the public that candidate Eisenhower and the Republican party would provide a stark contrast to the inaction of the Democrats:

We are [rapidly] expending our friendships and prestige in the world. Increasing numbers turn away from our policies as too militaristic, too costly, too erratic, and too inconclusive for them to follow. . . Here are some specific acts which we could take: We could welcome the creation in the free world of political "task forces" to develop a freedom program for each of the captive nations. Each group would be made up of those who are proved patriots, who have practical resourcefulness and who command confidence and respect at home and abroad. We could stimulate the escape from behind the Iron Curtain of those who can help develop these programs. . . The activities of the Voice of America and such private committees as those for Free Europe and Free Asia could be coordinated with these freedom programs. The agencies would be far more effective if given concrete jobs to do. . . Only a united America can unify the free world, [and] these policies befit our

³⁷John Foster Dulles, "A New Foreign Policy," reprinted from *Life* 19 May 1952, p. 1.

³⁸Spanier, p. 100.

nation in its majestic role today -- at once the guardian and the servant of the hopes of all those who love freedom.³⁹

It was obvious from these statements that the Republicans were trying to convince the electorate as well as the world that this election had the potential to usher in a new era in Cold War diplomacy, and in so doing restore hope to the oppressed peoples of the world because the US liberation machine was once again up and running. Dulles said, "We should let truths work in and through us. We should be dynamic, we should use ideas as weapons; and these ideas should conform to our moral principles. . . We should make it publicly known that the United States wants and expects liberation to occur."⁴⁰ At the time these statements were made, the Cold War, with its conflict raging in Korea and the fearful power of the Sino-Soviet bloc, was beginning to look prohibitively expensive to the American public. The Republicans thus appeared not only to promise an eventual end to the Cold War --but in their promise not to accept indefinite coexistence as the Democrats were doing, they also pledged themselves to do it at less cost.

Looking at Dulles' bold words concerning the international scene in hindsight, it appears that things international were far from his mind. Ensuring a victory in the November election was the primary focus of the notoriously single-minded Dulles. One historian recounts how impressed Dulles was with Samuel Lubell's analysis of the American political situation, *The Future of American*

³⁹Dulles, "A New Foreign Policy," pp. 2-13.

⁴⁰Spanier, p. 100.

Politics, from which Dulles ". . . had concluded that the Republicans could never win a national election unless they succeeded in detaching certain specific groups in the voting population from their normal Democratic allegiance . . . These groups who still had relatives in the [East European] countries of their origin, or sentimental ties to them, would be moved to vote for the party that promised to replace containment by liberation."⁴¹

Dulles was not the only Republican trying to get into office by selling liberation policy. In his speeches, candidate Eisenhower, used much the same rhetoric as Dulles, implying the same role for America in the struggle for freedom around the world. In a speech at Philadelphia, September 4, 1952, Eisenhower said, "We will seek to stir and develop in these lands an understanding and a love of freedom which will reach the minds and move the hearts of the highest and the lowliest. Then there will develop the will and readiness to defend freedom for its own sake, and our security will thereby be strengthened. . . [T]his program is to aid by every peaceful means, but only by peaceful means, the right to live in freedom."⁴²

⁴¹Louis J. Halle, "Sloganeering: Liberation and Massive Retaliation," *The Eisenhower Era*, Paul S. Holbo and Robert W. Sellen ed. (Illinois: The Drysdale Press, 1974), p. 147.

⁴²Council On Foreign Relations, *Documents on American Foreign, 1952* (New York: Harper, 1953), pp. 90-92.

Eisenhower elaborated further in a speech on October 8, 1952, in which he said:

We are trying to get the world by peaceful means to believe the truth. The truth is that Americans want a world at peace, a world in which all people shall have opportunity for maximum individual development. The means we shall employ to spread this truth is often called "psychological." Don't be afraid of that term just because it's a five dollar, five syllable word. "Psychological warfare" is the struggle for the minds and wills of men. Many people think "psychological warfare" means just the use of propaganda like the controversial "Voice of America." Certainly the use of propaganda, of the written and spoken word, of every means known to transmit ideas, is an essential part of winning other people to your side.⁴³

One final example of Eisenhower's lofty aspirations should he become President, is contained in his personal diaries. On January 6, 1953, he wrote, ". . . the two strongest Western powers must not appear before the world as a combination of forces to compel adherence to the status quo. The free world's hope of defeating the communist aims does not include objecting to national aspirations."⁴⁴

It seems that this pre-election rhetoric by the Republicans, who would find victory in the election, presented a very clear message to those groups around the world who were involved in a struggle for their freedom. As 1953 began, and the Eisenhower Administration began to take shape, notably with Dulles as the

⁴³Council On Foreign Relations, *Documents on American Foreign, 1952* (New York: Harper, 1953), pp. 99-100.

⁴⁴Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York: Norton & Co., 1981), pp. 223-224.

Secretary of State, two obstacles soon became apparent with regard to the liberation policy the public had heard so much about. The first obstacle proved to be the fact that old attitudes about former enemies do not die easily, particularly in the minds of legislators with war weary constituencies. It was only natural for fears concerning Germany to persist considering the previous forty years.

The second problem concerned the apparent lack of direction the Administration had for turning their domestic vote-getting proclamations into concrete foreign policy actions. With Cold War superpower relations already chilled by the Korean War, the Administration certainly wanted to avoid any immediate policy changes which might have been an affront to the Soviets and would handicap relations with them from the outset. The dialogue coming from Congress indicated that the majority opinion was in favor of helping the East Germans with the new US liberation policies. However the actions of the Administration failed to support the enthusiastic foreign policy making which they had helped to bring into the government. The discourse recorded in the Public Papers of the President, as well as the Congressional Record of the United States provides a telling indication of the indecisiveness characterizing US foreign policy at this time. What follows is but a fraction of the debate that took place in the US policy making circles.

On January 22, 1953, the Hon. Isidore Dollinger of New York made a statement in the House of Representatives saying, "In concentrating our efforts against the evils of communism we could lose sight of the fact that fascism is equally dangerous and imperils democracy."⁴⁵ It became clear, only three days into the administration that NAZI paranoia was still alive and well in some legislators. On May 25, 1953, in the Senate, the Hon. James E. Murray, stated with regard to American aid to Germany, ". . . the Germans have cunningly exploited the humanitarian feelings of the American people in the past."⁴⁶ On April 16, 1953, the same day as the President would present a speech suggesting optimism in foreign relations, the Hon. Louis B. Heller, speaking in the House, agreed wholeheartedly with an article he chose to read from the New York Post:

It is easy for some Americans who have never endured German conquest to dismiss the fears as irrational; surely the immediate peril is the specter of Soviet armed power. But Europeans may justly retort that it is equally irrational for Americans to forget so swiftly the terrors of German militarism and the occasion on which it suddenly joined hands with the Soviet despotism to set off World War II. When Dr. Adenauer was in Washington the other day, a band played Deutschland Uber Alles in recognition of the new diplomatic way. . . But, it still sounds like funeral music to me.⁴⁷

There are, contained in the same records a greater number of examples showing support for bold foreign policy actions to support the cause of the dissenters in East Germany.

⁴⁵*The Congressional Record of the United States--Appendix*, 1953, p. A231.

⁴⁶*The Congressional Record of the United States--Appendix*, 1953, p. A2894.

⁴⁷*The Congressional Record of the United States--Appendix*, 1953, p. A1953.

It appeared on April 16, 1953, particularly in light of Stalin's death, that diplomacy between the Eastern Bloc and the West was clearly beginning to show signs of relaxation. In an address entitled "The Chance for Peace" delivered by President Eisenhower before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the President stated:

The new Soviet leadership now has a precarious opportunity to awaken, with the rest of the world, to the point of peril reached and to help turn the tide of history. Will it do this? We do not yet know. Recent statements and gestures of Soviet leaders give some evidence that they may recognize this critical moment. We welcome every honest act of peace. We care nothing for mere rhetoric. We are only for sincerity of peaceful purpose attested by deeds. The opportunities for such deeds are many.⁴⁸

It seemed at this point that the US executive branch was ready to take an active role in attempting to resolve such points of contention in the Cold War as the reunification of Germany. Eisenhower's remarks certainly paved the way for détente between icy adversaries. This fact, coupled with a willingness to support increased US efforts for the liberation of those captive to communist satellites, must have been music to an East German dissenter's ears. The Hon. Charles Kersten sounded a positive tone on June 17, as the uprising was taking place. He said, "It is entirely feasible for us to reach our hand through the barbed wire of the Iron Curtain and help these people get rid of their hated Communist governments."⁴⁹ Similar sentiments were echoed by other speakers on June 23 as well. It seems

⁴⁸*The Public Papers of the Presidents*, (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1953), p. 184.

⁴⁹*The Congressional Record of the United States--House*, 1953, p. 6697.

very ironic that this statement was made just as the Radio in the American Sector programmers were told to curtail their broadcast of any information which would help the demonstrators organize. This point will be saved for later discussion.

June 26 brought further realization of the opportunities created for the West by the June 17 uprising. The Hon. Thomas J. Lane of Massachusetts stated in the House that, "The tremors from the events in East Germany have registered sharply on the seismographs in Moscow. The Russian grasp on the satellite lands has slipped. The effects of this powerful realization upon the men in the Kremlin may be profound for them and for all the world."⁵⁰ The need for vocal sympathy with the people of the GDR was recognized in the Watkins-Kersten Resolution on Friendship With East German People on June 30, 1953.

Another example of an attempt to arouse policy makers, by a member in the US Congress that apparently fell on very biased, very deaf ears throughout the rest of the Congress as well as the United States, were remarks made in the House by the Hon. Clement J. Zablocki of Wisconsin in a speech entitled "Where are the Liberators?" He cried, "This is the time for action. This is the time for press, through diplomatic channels and propaganda means, for the release of Soviet political prisoners, for the restoration of human rights, for the holding of free,

⁵⁰*The Congressional Record of the United States--Appendix*, 1953, p. A3945.

United Nations supervised elections in the Soviet-dominated countries of Eastern Europe."⁵¹ Representative Lane from Massachusetts added July 9, saying:

Russian tanks are shooting down workers--I repeat, workers--among the restive peoples of East Germany. . . This presents us with a wonderful opportunity to increase the strains and tensions within the Communist empire that will force it to break up or to retreat from the lands it has conquered by treachery and force. How to do this? Not by giving the Communists a chance to recover. Not by letting down the trade barrier. . . Not by discouraging our oppressed friends within Soviet slave-labor camps. . . Berlin, in the heart of the Communist wasteland, is the place to start this dynamic counterrevolution. . . Stock it with food marked "Free to all who want to be free." With our surpluses this can be done easily. What are we waiting for? America, speak up.⁵²

Yet, when the actions taken by the Eisenhower Administration are graded for their liberating qualities, particularly in light of the valiant struggle of the East Germans, they do not match either the strength of the campaign rhetoric or the desires of prominent legislators, both Republican and Democrat. It must be said, the new emphasis in policy almost certainly contributed to the final achievement in 1953 of an armistice in Korea. The Communist rulers must have been impressed and cautioned for some time, by the proclaimed vigor and assertiveness of the new administration. It cannot be said that the talk of rollback and about liberation had any significant influence upon the Soviet grip upon the peoples of East Central Europe. The only tangible policy actions taken included the August 1953

⁵¹*The Congressional Record of the United States--Appendix*, 1953, p. A4188.

⁵²*The Congressional Record of the United States--House*, 1953, p. 8415.

distribution of food in the Western Zone of Berlin under the Mutual Security Appropriation Act, and the Refugee Relief Act to admit 214,000 non quota immigrants into the US on an emergency basis.⁵³ These paltry actions are in sharp contrast to the "dynamic," "psychological warfare" proclamations made by Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Republicans in general. If psychological warfare was to be one of the West's strongest tools in the fight against the Communists, then one is forced to ask why the Radio in the American Sector (RIAS), Voice of America (VOA), and possibly the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), both under US governmental control, did not play a more important role in the June 17 uprising? These questions are addressed below.

The CIA Role

An examination of the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in the June 17 uprising raises some interesting questions. As we have seen in previous sections, the US government was very aware of the situation that existed in East Germany during the first six months of 1953. The Congress, President, and even the American public were aware of the Communist-dominated regime's conspicuous actions during the months before the June uprising. They had aggressively attacked the churches, conducted a minor party purge, and tried to tighten their economic control while food supplies grew leaner and the exodus of

⁵³Council On Foreign Relations, *The United States in World Affairs, 1953* (New York: Harper, 1955), p. 480.

refugees to the West increased, reaching an all time high March, the same month as Stalin's death.⁵⁴ With the increased work norms that came in May, and the small strikes that took place the following week, it would seem that some interest in these events by the CIA under a proclaimed liberator government would not be unexpected. Of course, as with any case dealing with the CIA, many actions are very difficult to verify.

The demonstrations that took place in East Germany decisively discredited Communist claims of popular support for their government. Although they were quickly stifled by the overwhelming force of Soviet armor, they proved to be a public relations nightmare for the self proclaimed communist utopia. In light of this, the Soviets claimed the US covertly played a large role in the disturbance, while the US claimed the exact opposite, saying the CIA was not involved

The United States Council on Foreign Relations of 1953, records the situation claiming the Soviets were forced to try to save face by:

. . . shrilly accusing the Western powers, particularly the United States, of having planned and fomented them. To bolster this charge the authorities arrested a number of 'agents,' whose 'confessions,' however, were obviously spurious and were promptly repudiated by the Western commandants in Berlin. An even more convincing refutation of the charges, however, was the surprise and bewilderment with which official Washington reacted to the

⁵⁴Council On Foreign Relations, *The United States in World Affairs, 1953* (New York: Harper, 1955), p. 141.

uprising. . . the President, it is said, remained firmly opposed to the "bold" policy urged by his "psychological warfare" experts.⁵⁵

This version of CIA involvement in the June 1953 uprising went relatively unopposed until 1962 when a controversial book by Andrew Tully entitled *CIA: The Inside Story*, was published. In his insider book Tully makes several counter claims to the official Eisenhower government version of US covert influence in East Germany. Tully claims:

From evidence at hand [at CIA] and from unofficial sources it is obvious that American intelligence operatives, if they had no part in planning the "spontaneous" gesture, gave considerable aid and comfort to the rebels. It was after all, built to order for CIA's program of spreading anarchy and confusion in the camp. Sources with considerable access to the story of what went on behind the scenes indicate that CIA nevertheless had at least a sly finger in the pie. The reasoning, supported by background knowledge, is that some of the provocateurs captured by the communist authorities were too well equipped with blueprints for sabotage to have managed the business alone.⁵⁶

Having heard the proclamations made by Eisenhower and Dulles concerning the bold steps the US was going to take under to Republican leadership to weaken the Communist menace, Tully's comments do not seem so far fetched. In a situation, such as the June uprising, it would be relatively easy for the CIA to provide some amount of assistance to the rebels in the way of weapons, money, communications equipment, asylum for escaped dissidents, and simple moral support. But, Tully's

⁵⁵Council On Foreign Relations, *The United States in World Affairs, 1953* (New York: Harper, 1955), p.142.

⁵⁶Andrew Tully, *CIA: The Inside Story* (Greenwich, CT, Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1962), pp. 133-134.

claim that because they had blueprints of some government buildings, the rioters were supported by CIA operatives, does seem extremely weak in substance and significance. Tully continues on to say:

The result has been criticism of CIA for moving too soon in East Berlin, or at least for not dissuading the East Germans and those recruits from West Germany to postpone action until there was more promise of a general uprising. American intervention was out of the question unless we were prepared to risk World War III, and so it was even more important that intelligence be assured the East Germans could handle a revolt successfully without outside help.⁵⁷

The crucial point refuting Tully's hypothesis lies in the spontaneous beginnings and growth of the uprising and his ignorance of the real causes that brought the masses violently into the streets on June 17. It would have been impossible for the CIA to predict the way the East German government reacted to the people in the street on June 16, or the massive influence of unforeseen variable such as the loudspeaker vans which caused the rioter's numbers to swell so greatly. The role of the CIA in causing the riots seems to be quite minimal. But, why was the role of the CIA, and subsequently the Eisenhower Administration and the United States so minimal in helping the uprising to succeed? Once the riots had begun, it seems the US, if it really had the resolve to liberate people from communism, had several clear policy options. The US could easily have provided food, shelter, and information to the brave dissidents in East Germany. As has been discussed, the Mutual Security Appropriation Act and the Refugee Relief Act

⁵⁷Tully, p. 136.

provided food and shelter, although it was hopelessly late. But, what about information? The influence that correct, nation-wide information could have had on the uprising can not be overestimated. Both the Radio in the American Sector (RIAS) and the Voice of America (VOA) were ideally suited to provide this information to the millions of East Germans who were being crushed by communist oppression.

RIAS and the Voice of America

Dwight Eisenhower explained the importance of information and the spread of ideas in psychological warfare when he said, "Certainly the use of propaganda, of the written and spoken word, of every means known to transmit ideas, is an essential part of winning other people to your side."⁵⁸ It is understandable, when faced with the military might of the Soviet Union, that one would act with a certain caution in order to avoid provoking an adversary. But, it is also expected that an administration whose popularity at election time was based on promises of aggressive action in liberating people from the oppression of the Communists. As was discussed earlier, RIAS played an important role in pre-riot events, particularly by providing hourly updates of the situation during June 15 and June 16. In many cases, the RIAS broadcasts were the only knowledge of unrest that some East Germans received.

⁵⁸Council On Foreign Relations, *Documents on American Foreign, 1952* (New York: Harper, 1953), pp. 99-100.

Also mentioned above was the order given by the American Director of the RIAS to remove any mention of the a general uprising from further broadcasts after its initial mention at 4:30 P.M. on June 16. This Director was the same who refused to allow western building workers, ". . . who appeared in the RIAS building to ask if they could broadcast to their colleagues in the eastern sector and zone," to enter the building. The workers had explained that they merely wanted to bring the workers together and spread the news of a general strike.⁵⁹ RIAS was the only western news service to take an interest in the events in the GDR because the uprising was feared to be a hoax by other news services. Thus, the ability to influence the uprising through external broadcasts fell solely on the RIAS.

As Russian troops patrolled the streets on the evening on June 17, many Soviet Zone Germans felt the true distress of separation and loneliness more acutely than ever before. Stefan Brant, a historian of the uprising says:

They may have recovered their breath sufficiently to be able to appreciate the impossibility of Western military intervention; but many felt that organizations in West Berlin or in Western Germany might at least have provided central leadership for the rising from outside. Some were inclined to regard this as the natural task of RIAS, and so waited, in vain, for instructions.⁶⁰

The East Germans' fatal error seems to have been in their belief the US State Department, which controlled the RIAS, was willing to endorse a political role for

⁵⁹Baring, p. 83.

⁶⁰Brant, p. 192.

the radio station. At the most critical hour, the East German longing for leadership, sympathy and interest fell on unwilling, deaf ears. If the fear behind US inaction was provocation of the Soviets, it would seem that the CIA, in all its ingenuity could have devised a scheme to organize an East German dissident takeover of the station during the critical hours of the uprising to defer US responsibility for broadcast content. Obviously hindsight is 20/20, and such a question is uninformed by many of the limitations RIAS and CIA were working under. But, to remove RIAS from involvement in the uprising at its most critical hour, was not a logical move for a self-proclaimed liberator nation's foreign policy to make.

VI

Conclusion

Having looked closely at the nature of the June 1953 uprising in the GDR, it becomes evident that the underlying causes cannot be easily discerned or understood. The problem is further complicated by the fact that most of the key figures in the uprising, who could have served to help history understand the events of June 17, were shot by the Communists on June 18, or shortly thereafter. For these reasons a great deal of educated speculation must take place. Because of these circumstances, and in order to more fully understand the June 17 uprising, questions about what the rest of the world was doing, specifically in the US, must be asked.

It would be unfair to claim that the West, in particular the entire US government was blind to the types of dissent in the GDR, because clearly not all the lawmakers and policy-makers were seeing the uprising in the wrong way. The situation simply begs the questions: Could more have been done to help the courageous dissidents in the GDR, and could stronger US foreign policy action have changed the course of German history and of the Cold War? The facts of the uprising answer with a resounding "yes." It is quite possible that calls for UN elections in Germany would have met with little resistance given a potential Soviet

willingness to adopt a softer line in the aftermath of harsh Stalinist years. If this had been the case, the weakening effect on the Soviet hold on other satellite countries would have been great.

The Republicans promised to do more than the Democrats had done to liberate oppressed peoples and at less cost than during containment years. In retrospect, such goals were incompatible and unattainable. This case is evidence that good intentions, unsupported by concrete political and military policies, possess a notorious impotence on the international scene. The impotency of the Republican led US foreign policy during the East German events of 1953 indicates that the Republican campaign promises were in fact aimed at rolling back the Democrats instead of the Communists. In this task, the policy was successful. But, in its larger role, it must certainly be seen as a failure, for it would be nearly forty long years, before the East Germans would bravely rise, and finally taste the sweetness of freedom. This dramatic call for change will be addressed in the second half of this study.

Whatever the viewpoint, the uprising is a tribute to the human spirit's capability to take a stand in the face of extreme adversity. It must be remembered.

VII

Introduction to Part II

Now for the good news! Having examined the sad history of the June 17, 1953 uprising in East Germany and the debatable role of US foreign policy, this study will now examine another uprising in East Germany in 1989-1990. This uprising, better called a revolution, does not contain the bloodshed and Soviet armor of its 1953 cousin, but it certainly does embody the same human drama, bravery, and cause for US self-evaluation, as the events of 1953.

It is hard to quantify the events of 1989-1990 in East Germany. To label them a mere revolution, seems to indicate the sentiments behind the revolt somehow sprung up in spontaneous reaction to a social condition. This is not the case, and in my opinion is what distinguishes the events of 1988-89 from those of 1953. In the 1953 uprising, there was an outpouring of sentiment about the practices of a government which would not listen to the people, blindly forcing its communist practices and ideals on a crippled post-war population. In the thirty six years between 1953 and 1989, the Germans who happened to be on the wrong side of a line drawn by men from other countries, would find out the unfavorable conditions of 1953 East Germany were just a drop in the bucket compared to the corruption and oppression they would see. In this interim period between the

uprising that failed and the uprising that brought about an East German revolution, the feelings of oppression, distrust, and hatred for the communist government had time to grow. Such growth, from an emotional reaction to independent governmental actions, into a tide of unrest that finding an appropriate time for outlet, could not be stopped.

The citizens of the German Democratic Republic labored quietly through their lives, doing as the Party would have them do. They watched a wall being built around them, not so much to keep the West out, but to keep the East in. Each night, from their tiny and often crowded apartments, the East Germans could tune their television or radio to a western station, and escape for a few hours to a land that sounded very different from their own. For those citizens who wanted to effect real change in their government, their only hope was to wait for the day when they could speak their minds without being summarily crushed by a Soviet tank. It would be the political happenings within the GDR as well as outside their borders that would make this a reality.

The US Presidential election of 1980 ushered in Ronald Reagan. His brand of tough-talk seemingly taken directly from one of his western style movies, coupled with a talent for being the "Great Communicator", would begin to force a new relationship with the USSR. The death of Leonid Brezhnev in the Soviet Union in 1982, and the short lived rule of Yuri Andropov and Constantin

Chernenko, allowed the succession of Mikhail Gorbachev. This younger man, whose rhetoric included talk of "perestroika" and "glasnost" differed greatly from his predecessors. To the silent, fearful dissidents of the GDR who lived in the remembrance of the fate of their brothers in 1953, Gorbachev was a symbol that new, younger leaders can bring about great change. They knew their own aging leader, Erich Honecker, could not last much longer. It was time for what they would later call the *Wende*, meaning turn, or turnabout: The revolution that would, with its counterparts in other Soviet satellite countries, and finally in the Soviet Union itself, change the political landscape of the world, and bring about the end of the Cold War.⁶¹

Having focused on the Soviet actions and US inaction that doomed the 1953 uprising to failure, the following is an investigation into the influences which allowed the events of the late 1980's to change the GDR. As with Part I, an understanding of the revolution and the underlying sentiments and actions driving it, must first be gained. This will be followed by an examination of the external influences on the revolution, particularly those of US and Soviet foreign policy. The study seeks to show that with some foresight, determination, and a whole lot of luck, US foreign policy avoided many of the mistakes made in 1953, and was

⁶¹Melvin J. Lasky, *Voices in a Revolution: Intellectuals & Others in the Collapse of the East German Communist Regime* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1990), pp. 7-9.

successful in aiding, or at the very least in not hindering, the cause of freedom in East Germany.

VIII

"As far as the question of power is concerned, Comrade Minister, we've got the situation firmly in our hands, and it is stable. . . " Secret Police General Hummitzsch to Secret Police Chief Erich Mielke, 31 August 1989.

"Hate is a passion all tyrants are bound to arouse, but contempt is often the cause by which tyrannies are actually overthrown."

Aristotle

Cracks in The Wall

The events of June 1953 illustrated one point very strongly. This was the fact that the permanent division of Germany seemed almost inconceivable to a great percentage of the East German population. In the aftermath of the defeat of the uprising in 1953 there were two primary western influences on the dissident movement within the GDR. The first was simply the presence of a usually accommodating Federal Republic that would serve as the destination for a mass exodus of East Germans until the total closing of the East-West border by the Berlin Wall in 1961. The second influence was the constant, though at times,

extremely feeble calls for German reunification coming from proponents in the West.

Within the GDR, the rebuilding of an effective autonomous opposition to the communist government in the wake of the 1953 defeat, has been a slow process. One focus of the dissent within the GDR has been opposition to militarism. The distaste for the military was apparent following the formation in 1956 of the National People's Army (NVA) and the introduction of conscription six years later without any provisions for conscientious objection. "Such provisions were officially deemed unnecessary because according to the SED, the DDR was by its very nature a 'Peace State.'"⁶² The response to this was that some 3000 East German men refused to be conscripted during the first year the law was in effect. Amazingly, only about a dozen of these draft resisters were arrested and placed in prison. It seems in this case that the Party's words backfired in the respect that it did not look too favorable for the "Peace State" to jail thousands of youth for refusing to bear arms.

It was the resistance to conscription which saw examples of dissent in the GDR emanate from two very distinct but by no means exclusive sources. The first was the youth, simply because the idea of conscription directly affected them and their freedom of choice. The other source was the East German religious

⁶²Bruce Allen, p. 93.

community. In 1963, the church's position on the issue would begin to take on a formal shape with the release of a document entitled, "Ten Articles Concerning Peace and the Service of the Church" authored by the East German Lutheran Church. The basics of this document stated the Church's belief that it was ". . . obligated to provide legal protection for conscientious objectors.⁶³

The result of this increased pressure placed by the Churches on the SED and its policy of forced military service, was powerful enough, combined with persistent evidence of dissent among the youth, to cause the conscription law to be amended September 7, 1964 providing an alternative to military service for the conscientious objector. However, the amendment did not truly address the concerns of either the church or the youth. It actually only provided for the existence of construction brigades in the NVA.. Although the members of these work brigades did not have to bear arms, the members were still subject to military discipline. The simple absence of weapons from their military service, predictably did not pacify those true conscientious objectors. Initially, many of those who might make use of the work brigades were not informed of their existence, but by 1970 many had exercised this option and the numbers of unarmed construction soldiers in the GDR was steadily increasing.⁶⁴ During the same period the heavy industrial sector of the GDR had sufficiently developed, and was tooled towards the

⁶³Joyce Marie Mushaben, "Swords to Ploughshares: The Church, the State and the East German Peace Movement," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. XVII No 2., p. 125.

⁶⁴Allen, p. 95.

production of military goods for a large percentage of its total quota. This fact, coupled with the necessities of the Cold War arms race, forced the GDR to continue to become more militarized. The natural result of this was the continued growth of opposition to militarization by the Church, as well as the youth of the GDR.

The protest of conscription in 1962 was relatively small compared with the unrest that would be registered during the decade of the 1970's. The primary catalyst for what was to take place was the introduction of formal "Defense Studies" into the general polytechnical schools of the GDR. This measure, put into effect in June 1978 and spearheaded by Margot Honecker, was simply a continuation of increasing efforts during the early 1970's to create support for militarization among those under the age of conscription. This extremely unpopular action gave rise to one of the particularly provocative religious measures; one that would serve to highlight the increased role of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the rise of governmental opposition, and lead to the formation of an autonomous peace movement in the 1980's.

The Protestant Church ". . . facilitated the organization of regular meetings of former and future military resisters."⁶⁵ Within the discussion of these groups, the Church decided that military education in the manner of the Defense Studies would, ". . . contribute to an atmosphere of anxiety, foster a hatred of the

⁶⁵Mushaben, p. 127.

'enemy', contradictory to the Christian teachings, and instill the belief that military action was an acceptable behavioral norm for conflict resolution." The Church also provided youth instruction through Peace Education Initiatives for those parents who did not wish to allow their students to receive their education solely through the Defense Studies Decree. The SED response to the Church opposition was essentially one of indifference maintaining that "... the stability of the GDR and its readiness to defend itself was a contribution to preserving and securing peace in Central Europe."⁶⁶

The early 1980's saw continued resistance to the militarism of the GDR government. In particular there was a considerable increase in the efforts of both the Church and the youth; the authorities would grant the right to conscientious objection establishing alternatives to military service that were open to "... religious and moral objectors and that remain completely separate from the military realm."⁶⁷ One influence on the East German churches was the Dutch Inter-Church Peace Council (IKV). In the late 1970's it began supporting a 'self-disarmament model' aimed at setting a symbolic example for the arms racing Cold War countries to follow. The churches of the GDR began to see that parallel support for these types of measures would lend an amount of international legitimacy to the seemingly losing battle they were fighting with the SED on the militarism issue.

⁶⁶Allen, p. 97.

⁶⁷Barbara Donovan, "Conscientious Objection in Eastern Europe," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/9 (Eastern Europe), 26 January 1988, p. 2.

The IKV was in the practice of holding "Peace Weeks" in an attempt to make their cause more widely known across Europe. The GDR churches soon seized the opportunity to hold their own Peace Weeks, culminated by periodic exchange visits during the respective Peace Weeks in the Netherlands and the GDR. Soon the GDR churches were able to coordinate their events with similar Peace Weeks in the Federal Republic, ". . . effectively giving them an all German character."⁶⁸

The result of the introduction of the "self-disarmament model" into the East German opposition movement became evident in November 1981 when the Synod of Protestant Churches in Saxony passed a resolution calling for ". . . unilateral disarmament moves by the Warsaw Pact specifically reducing the number of Soviet tanks and SS-20 missiles."⁶⁹ This resolution coupled with the acceptance of a "Make Peace Without Weapons" and a corresponding "Swords to Ploughshares" wearable emblem, became the visible trademarks of a movement increasingly vocal and aimed at the heart of SED policy. "This was because the symbol came to be recognized as the viable trademark of an uncontrolled political movement . . ."; in the words of prominent peace activist, Roland Jahn, this movement ". . . arose from the contradiction between the officially-proclaimed desire for peace and social reality, characterized by growing rearmament and the militarization of society."⁷⁰

⁶⁸Allen, p. 99.

⁶⁹Adam Hochschild, "Behind the Lines With Europe's Most Daring Peace Activists," *Mother Jones*, September/October 1982, p. 33.

⁷⁰Allen, p. 99.

The GDR government responded with active repression making display of the symbol officially illegal in March 1982.

The obvious displeasure of the SED with the church's role in stirring up opposition to militarism did cause religious leaders to back down slightly, and subsequently to urge compliance with the ban of the Swords to Ploughshares symbol. Calls for a civilian alternative to military service however, continued to be heard, and as a result the autonomous peace movement continued to expand. As independent activist groups began to grow, so did the strength and scope of their demands on the government.

On February 13, 1982, a group called the "Dresden Forum" staged a rally which turned out to be a spectacular peace event. At the rally the persecution of those who supported the Swords to Ploughshares movement as well as support for a newly written activist document entitled the Berlin Appeal, were discussed. The result was a broad show of support by over 5000 participants for the Berlin Appeal and its anti-nuclear weapons message in addition to continued support for the independent peace initiatives called for in the Ploughshares charter. Indicative of the broad appeal of the rally was the fact that of the eighty participants questioned by police following the event, ". . . three turned out to be the children of SED officials."⁷¹

⁷¹Hochschild, p. 37.

The East German autonomous peace movement received new impetus for action from the US-Soviet debate over the placement of new Cruise, Pershing 2, and SS-20 missiles in Europe. The specific concerns of the movements, while they still contained their long held conflict with the militarism of the SED, began to show concern for the ecological impacts of nuclear arsenals placed by opposing superpowers in their own back yards. The February rally of the Dresden Forum was followed by similar actions in June with an estimated 3500 people in Potsdam, and also in a religious festival in Eisenbach which drew 10,000 teenagers.⁷² The peace movement within the GDR was undergoing a strong transformation into a credible and consciously oppositional political force within the country. This was achieved throughout the mid-1980's as the process of ". . . closing ranks in a practical way with the forces of political opposition active elsewhere in Eastern Europe, in a manner complementary to the continuation of its ongoing links with the peace and ecological activists in Western Europe."⁷³ This linkage coupled with a continuous formation of small but active dissident groups in the same period would eventually cause the political balance of power in the GDR to shift from the SED into the hands of the vocal opposition force.

Evidence of the continual formation of new vocal opposition groups in East Germany during the mid-1980's, are groups such as the Initiative for Peace and

⁷²Allen, p. 108.

⁷³Allen, p. 124.

Human Rights, founded in 1986, to stress human rights violations in the GDR apart from efforts already made by the Evangelical Church. Another group, the Church From Below founded in the Spring of 1987, is based on efforts to press the Evangelical Church ". . . to represent more effectively the interests of the Church's *basis*, or grass roots movements, vis-à-vis the state." Also the Civil Rights Activists, founded in September 1987, was formed to ". . . further the cause of would-be emigrants through open, public protests." A final example of the various groups formed during this period, in conjunction with one or more of the major churches, were those protesting the continuing ecological destruction of the GDR by heavy industry and nuclear accidents such as the Chernobyl disaster. One such group was the Environmental Library, founded in 1986.⁷⁴

As late as 1988, in spite of all the efforts of the Church and other groups to bring about change in the Communist government's position with respect to militarism and forced service in the military, there was no civilian alternative to military service for conscientious objectors. Although the East German authorities were reported ". . . not to have imprisoned any of the young men who had refused both military service and service in the construction units, . . . this unspoken concession did not make up for the lack of a civilian service in the eyes of the independent human rights groups."⁷⁵

⁷⁴*Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/228, 26 January 1988, pp. 6-7.

⁷⁵Barbara Donovan, "Conscientious Objection in Eastern Europe," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/9 (Eastern Europe), 26 January 1988, p. 4.

The Crackdown

The rising wave of popular unrest in the GDR, coupled with a continued steadfast reluctance to join in the reforms being pursued by the Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, eventually proved to be too much pressure for Eric Honecker and the SED to idly endure. The SED considered that dissidents were using Gorbachev's slogans and arguments simply as a means of advancing their own political goals. There would be two waves of repression. The first occurred during the nights of November 24-25 and 25-26, 1987. On the first night security forces raided the basement headquarters of the Environmental Library where they were printing their newsletter *Die Umweltblaetter* (Environmental Pages). The result was the arrest of seven persons, and the group's printing and duplicating equipment was seized. This scene was repeated in several other cities.

The reaction to this oppression turned out to be much more than the government had bargained for. One underground newspaper *Grenzfall*, which was not raided, later recalled the reaction to the events saying, "This time there was resistance--widespread solidarity from the punk to the bishop, throughout the country--and this was something those who launched the challenge of a trial of strength did not expect."⁷⁶ The simultaneous uproar of objection that occurred within the activist and religious circles of the GDR, as well as on the international

⁷⁶Allen, pp. 169-170.

scene, resulted in the release of those arrested by November 28. The net effect, was the strengthening unity among the independent groups, and as a result of a newly perceived threat, there was an increase of ". . . support from sections of the population which had otherwise tended to be very reserved about political activity."⁷⁷

The euphoria from this gain in confidence within the independent groups soon wore off when an even more severe dissident crackdown took place January 17, 1988. The event that sparked the arrests and deportations that would follow, was a demonstration by human rights activists to parallel the official annual rally on January 17. This Party rally commemorated the deaths in 1919 of the communist revolutionaries Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Some 120 activists were quickly arrested by the Security Police for what the party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* called measures to ". . . maliciously disturb the mourning." Less than one week later 54 of those who had been arrested were deported to West Germany. An additional six prominent activists were arrested on January 25. Eleven of the activists arrested on both dates were eventually sentenced to prison terms ranging from six months to one year for their participation in an "unlawful assembly" and having "treasonable ties to the West."⁷⁸ Once again there were protests on an

⁷⁷Susan Buckingham, "Freedom to Think Differently," *East European Reporter*, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 56.

⁷⁸Barbara Donovan, "Crackdown On Dissidents in the GDR," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/22 (German Democratic Republic), 17 February 1988, p. 1.

international scale, and it looked as if the authorities' strategy might backfire. The following is one account of the upsurge of protest records:

Prayer services, vigils, and other solidarity actions were organized in Churches in an estimated thirty-two cities and towns across the DDR. Tens of thousands took part at one time or another. Approximately 350,000 East German marks were collected for the jailed members of The Initiative. Several Churches set up hot lines to provide the latest news about the arrests. The authorities had no interest in organizing a trial and having people imprisoned. There was already a huge amount of protest and they did not want any martyrs. The Church was eager to find a solution too. Its buildings were full of protesters.⁷⁹

All that the government could truly hope to accomplish was to temporarily silence some of its leading critics. Unfortunate for the government was the fact that deporting the activists only gave them a greater opportunity to promote their cause in the West, whose television broadcasts were still received by many in the GDR. This merely increased the feeling of solidarity that activists within the GDR felt with others throughout the rest of Europe. A summit meeting between Honecker and Evangelical Church Bishop Werner Leich on March 3 was soon followed by the commencement of state censorship of Church newspapers. The grave conflict in Church-state relations continued throughout the summer of 1988, and was punctuated in September when Leich broke his customary reserve and openly

⁷⁹Elizabeth Pond, "East German Crackdown on Dissent Backfires," *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 2, 1988, p. 9. See also Editors, "Hidden Opposition in the DDR," *East European Reporter*, Vol. No. 3, p. 67

demanded reforms, which, he said were, ". . . urgently needed to create a socialist society with a human face."⁸⁰

Honecker and the Old Line

The question that arises is why such a crackdown took place. The most significant indications lie in the intensifying identity crisis of the SED. This conflict was caused by reforms which Soviet President Gorbachev was implementing, as well as the rising amount of organized, powerful and internationally recognized dissent within the GDR. "By cracking down on dissident activities with the sort of force displayed, . . . the SED clearly hoped to re-established any political authority lost in the course of the unofficial debates about Gorbachev's reformism . . ."⁸¹ This emphasized their intention to maintain a strict monopoly on controlling the speed and depth of reforms, if they were to be seen at all, in the GDR. The release of the detainees, and the subsequent deportation of many leading figures within the groups affected by the crackdown, seems to illustrate the dilemma that was faced by the SED. They needed a means to lessen the influence of some of the more outspoken opposition leaders in the GDR, yet they did not wish to seriously set back inter-German relations by simply imprisoning the dissidents.

⁸⁰"German Democratic Republic," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/251, 26 December 1988, pp. 24-25.

⁸¹Barbara Donovan, "Crackdown On Dissidents in the GDR," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/22 (German Democratic Republic), 17 February 1988, pp. 3-4.

In addition to the constantly growing internal dissent in the GDR, there was also a widening rift between the policies of the Gorbachev-led Soviet government and the GDR, once seen as the crown jewel of the satellite countries. When Gorbachev came to power, he soon began immediately an aggressive reform program in the Soviet Union; in addition he supported an international agenda aimed at changing the focus of superpower international affairs from one of confrontation, as illustrated by the Euromissiles issue, into one of détente. Although the specific impact of Gorbachev will not be discussed until later, it is enough to realize at this point that the reappraisals of the CPSU's history being fostered by Gorbachev's reform program, were making Honecker and the SED very uneasy about their own legitimacy.

One example of this was the emergence of the view in the Soviet media that Stalin's policies and the German Communist Party in the 1930's, had indirectly helped Hitler to build up power. This led to the East German authorities' decision in December to ban the Soviet press digest *Sputnik*. The SED saw such interpretations as ". . . distortions that undermined the GDR's 'anti fascist' heritage with which the SED's legitimacy has always been closely linked."⁸² By banning the Soviet publication it must certainly have been Honecker's intention to slow the

⁸²"German Democratic Republic," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/251, 26 December 1988, pp. 24-25.

flow of Gorbachev's reform ideas into the GDR, thereby reducing the expectations of change seeded by these reforms among East Germans.

If there were any real expectations that the SED was moving toward change, they were quickly quelled by the fall session of the SED's Central Committee (CC) that was held on December 1-2, 1988. This seventh plenum of the SED was significant for several reasons. First, it showed the resolve of the Honecker and the SED to pursue an independent course from the Soviet Union in light of the drastic reforms being made by Gorbachev. Honecker made this clear by saying, "We have never yet regarded copying as a replacement for our own theoretical thinking and practical actions, nor shall we ever do so." This is clearly an indication that there was serious strife taking place between Gorbachev and Honecker as to the proper direction of communism in the GDR.

The second plenum action that indicated their anti-reform stance was the fact that the CC also decided to convene the next SED congress in 1990, one year earlier than it was initially planned. The Politburo report gave no explanation for the decision but said that preparation for the congress would, "Contribute to our doing justice to the challenges with which the times have presented us with still greater vigor, far-sightedness, and responsibility and to our clarifying the tasks to be fulfilled . . . before the start of the 1991-1995 plan."⁸³ Many activists initially

⁸³Barbara Donovan, "East German CC Plenum Reflects Anti-reform Stance," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/240 (German Democratic Republic), 6 December 1988, pp. 2-4.

speculated that this was an indication that the next congress would usher in a new generation of rulers. More likely was that the congress, due to growing opposition and increasing economic problems caused by failures to meet plan goals, was trying to cement the SED's current strategy for at least another five years.

Coordinated Opposition

With the beginning of 1989, the SED leadership found itself with an ever-increasing autonomous opposition that was markedly different from any it was forced to deal with in the past. The difference could be found in three key characteristics. First, a great percentage of the opposition was made up not of people who wanted to leave the GDR, but by those who very much wanted to stay and change the country. This coupled with the enormous number of citizens who did want to emigrate to the West, represented a population quite unhappy with where they were.

Second of all, the individual movements were far more organized than any the SED was previously forced to deal with, often because of their powerful Church backing. Thirdly, as a result of the first two characteristics, the opposition forces in the GDR were also much more widely known on the international scene. Each of these factors combined to limit the options for the SED in repressing the activities of the groups. For the first time, the SED was faced with a situation where deportation would not make the activist happy, and imprisonment would not make

the international community happy. All that remained to be done, in order for the opposition groups to have real, unstoppable power, was for them to begin coordinating their efforts.

With the decision by Hungary to dismantle its border with Austria on May 2, 1989, many East Germans began to feel that this was a unique opportunity to flee to the West and get out from under the non-reforming communist government. Throughout the summer it was rumored that the East German government would soon impose restrictions on travel to Hungary, thereby shutting off the escape valve to Austria that Hungary was providing, and effectively creating an iron curtain behind the Iron Curtain. By mid-August, Hungary had become a refuge for thousands of East Germans who did not want to return to the GDR. On September 10, the Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Horn announced that, "Hungary had temporarily suspended an agreement with the GDR, signed in 1969, that bound the two countries to prevent each other's citizens from traveling to third countries without valid visas."⁸⁴

In light of this the East German government virtually stopped issuing visas for citizens to travel to Hungary. This caused thousands of refugees to seek refuge in the West German Embassies in Warsaw and Prague instead. The overcrowding at the embassies forced West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher on

⁸⁴Barbara Donovan, "East Germans in Hungary Allowed to Go West," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/172 (East-West Relations), 14 September 1989, p. 1.

September 30, to announce that an agreement had been worked out allowing the refugees to leave for the West.⁸⁵ A similar agreement was worked out by the Polish and Czechoslovakian governments with the West German authorities. As a result, an estimated total of 55,000 East Germans escaped to the West in the period following the agreements.⁸⁶

In the initial stages of the crisis, the East German leadership was clearly caught off guard and refused to cooperate in any way with the western host countries. Predictably, the East German government then attacked Hungary for allegedly ". . . violating international laws and for interfering in the internal affairs of the German Democratic Republic."⁸⁷ Against this background, and the distraction it was causing for the SED, the representatives of East Germany's now multifaceted dissident community decided to publicize a proposal to form a nationwide opposition movement out of many of the small, Church-affiliated groups scattered throughout the GDR. Speaking to a group of dissidents in a church in Treptow, a suburb of East Berlin, Hans-Juergen Fischbeck, a physicist at the Academy of Sciences in East Berlin, called for activists to ". . . join together in a movement for renewal that could offer an alternative with which [the population] could identify." Independent from the Church, this could lead to ". . . an internal

⁸⁵Barbara Donovan, "Migration from the German Democratic Republic," *Radio Free Europe Research*, German Democratic Republic, 1 December 1989, p. 10.

⁸⁶Robert Darnton, *Berlin Journal: 1989-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), p. 21.

⁸⁷Barbara Donovan, "Migration from the German Democratic Republic," *Radio Free Europe Research*, German Democratic Republic, 1 December 1989, p. 11.

democratic opening of society [as] the only way to begin to dismantle the [Berlin] Wall."⁸⁸

Fischbeck said the movement would operate above ground to bridge the gap between activist groups and the population at large saying, "It is no longer just a question of ensuring our survival as grassroots groups in all parts of the GDR. We want to make it clear that [these groups contain] people who are developing ideas, who can present proposals for change, and who can be talked to."⁸⁹ The move to merge the dissident groups was clearly a response to opinions in the GDR, that the independent opposition groups were frequently as disjointed and distant to the general population as the Party. In the words of one East German analyst before the decision to unify, ". . . the only organized opposition mass movement [in the GDR] [was] the one [moving] in the direction of the West."⁹⁰

The move also was an effort to stem the tide of emigration , which because it was lowering the number of active dissidents in the GDR, was adversely affecting the press for democratization by the remaining dissidents. If the opposition movement could be successful in stemming the emigration to the West,

⁸⁸Barbara Donovan, "Plans for a Coordinated Opposition Movement in the GDR," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/152 (German Democratic Republic), 18 August 1989, p. 1.

⁸⁹Barbara Donovan, "Plans for a Coordinated Opposition Movement in the GDR," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/152 (German Democratic Republic), 18 August 1989, p. 2.

⁹⁰Barbara Donovan, "Plans for a Coordinated Opposition Movement in the GDR," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/152 (German Democratic Republic), 18 August 1989, p. 3.

then the SED would be forced to recognize the opposition coalition as a viable force in the current politics of the GDR. On September 19, the largest of the new opposition groups, New Forum, applied for legal permission to exist as a political association in 11 of the GDR's 14 districts, ". . . as is allowed in the constitution." The application was rejected, and on September 21 the group was declared illegal.⁹¹

The Gorbachev Factor

As October 1989 was approaching, the GDR was preparing to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the GDR. With the celebration to take place on October 7, the decision on October 3 by the SED to allow a number of refugees to leave for the West, was clearly an attempt to lessen the tensions within the GDR before the event, which Mikhail Gorbachev was to attend. As was discussed earlier, Gorbachev and the reforms he was pursuing in the Soviet Union, were having a profound, indirect impact in the GDR.

The SED clearly shared the fears of the more conservative elements in the CPSU Politburo concerning pace and scope of the reforms advocated by Gorbachev. Indirectly criticizing Gorbachev, the East German leaders openly criticized those ". . . who look to market forces to improve the efficiency of socialist economies" and issued a firm rejection of reform proposals which would ". . . reduce the party to a debating club." It was clear that the SED believed it was

⁹¹Barbara Donovan, "Opposition in the GDR Grows," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/180 (German Democratic Republic), 25 September 1989, p. 3.

the only remaining party that was still traditionally attaching such a high value to ". . . ideological orthodoxy, political stability, and predictability."⁹² As the October 7 anniversary approached, SED fears became very evident concerning the possibility that dissident activities would be carried out in the hope of getting Gorbachev's as well as the World's attention.

With their knowledge of the reforms that Gorbachev was advocating in comparison with their own hard line stance against such reforms, the SED was well aware that Gorbachev could not be expected to attend the celebration in the GDR simply to endorse the SED resistance to change. The SED had to expect that he would speak about the kind of reforms that had become his program. Two weeks immediately prior to the celebration, Eric Honecker became ill, and rumors about the continuing effects of his ill health became widespread. The 77-year-old Honecker could not possibly rule for much longer; consequently speculation of his succession became intertwined with the Soviet leader's visit to the GDR. This was happening against the backdrop of the masses of East German citizens still attempting to flee to the West, a situation which had reawakened the perennial question of German reunification.

Thus, even before Gorbachev's arrival, dissent in the GDR was taking on two very obvious forms. On the one hand were the waves of would-be emigrants

⁹²"German Democratic Republic," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/251, 26 December 1988, p. 23.

climbing the fences of foreign embassies to escape the GDR. On the other hand was a confident and vocal opposition who saw Gorbachev's visit as an opportunity to emphasize that those East Germans who wished to stay at home, ". . . were no less dissatisfied with the regime's performance than the émigrés." In the shadow of a possible communist crackdown and massacre like that of June 1953, or as recent as June 1989 in China's Tiananmen Square, the dissidents began gathering to shout for an East German version of *perestroika*. "The crowds chanted: 'We are the nation' and 'We are staying here' and 'Freedom' and 'Gorbi! Gorbi!'"⁹³ Gorbachev did not disappoint the dissidents, when in his speech at the Palace of the Republic he said, "Matters affecting the GDR are decided not in Moscow but in Berlin." He added that ". . . the common process of modernization and rejuvenation that the socialist world has now embarked upon [are] also relevant to the GDR [and] no one can remain aloof." Gorbachev also suggested that the SED should be seeking solutions ". . . in cooperation with all public forces."⁹⁴ With these remarks Gorbachev had single-handedly removed the threat of the intervention of Soviet armor in the protests as was the case in 1953, 1956, and 1968 in the GDR, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. He had also given a great amount of legitimacy to the dissident movements.

⁹³Vladimir V. Kusin, "Gorbachev in East Germany," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/194 (Eastern Europe), 19 October 1989, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁴Kusin, p. 5.

The East German government responded to these protesters with threats, brutal police violence and mass arrests. In East Berlin and Leipzig, the protesters were attacked by police with clubs and water cannons. As many as 600 of the protesters were detained by police even though many of them had just joined the opposition parade after having attended the official anniversary activities. Somehow, the SED made it through the official celebration without the eruption of a civil war or great bloodshed. To no one's surprise however, the repression of the opposition on October 7 only caused the crowds to swell in the following days.⁹⁵

The Turning of the Tide

On Monday October 9, 1989, over 70,000 people took to the streets in Leipzig. The march was significant because it was the largest of the pro-democracy demonstrations that had been seen. It was also significant as it was not attacked by the police. The Stasi (secret police) and other armed forces were reportedly ". . . prepared to mow the Leipzigers down as they left the Nikolaikirche; but at the last minute--no one knows precisely why or how--they withdrew, leaving the streets to the people."⁹⁶ With the crowds as well as the members of the SED realizing what this tolerance meant in terms of the remaining power of Honecker, the political scene was destined to change very quickly. When the SED Politbureau met on

⁹⁵Bernard Gwertzman and Michael T. Kaufman, "How the Wall Cracked -- A Special Report; Party Coup Turned East German Tide," *The Collapse of Communism* (New York: Ny Times Co., 1990), p. 20.

⁹⁶Darnton, pp. 70-72.

October 11, 1989, Honecker's handling of the situation came under attack with all but two of the seventeen members speaking against Honecker.⁹⁷ A struggle for power ensued as Honecker's authority weakened, paralyzing the decision-making process at all levels. On October 18, Egon Krenz, the SED Polibureau's youngest member, replaced Honecker as the General Secretary of the Communist Party.

Krenz immediately began to replace old hard-line leaders and promised sweeping reforms to quiet the growing protests. The protests however, kept growing, particularly in Leipzig where the Monday evening marches had grown to include as many as 300,000 people on the evening of October 23. The angry crowds voiced their opposition to the appointment of Krenz saying, "Egon--who asked us?" 'Democracy over Krenz!' and 'Free elections!'"⁹⁸ What the public got were token reforms clearly designed to seize the initiative from the angry masses calling for reform. The official party newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, provided an example showing that the tune of the SED had not changed saying, "Our Party has in reality no other interest than the people and is now proving that it has the courage to face the truth."⁹⁹ Once again the party was claiming that it had all the answers and the people would not be satisfied.

⁹⁷Allen, p. 185.

⁹⁸Barbara Donovan, "The SED Tries to Reassert Itself," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/199 (German Democratic Republic), 27 October 1989, p. 1.

⁹⁹Barbara Donovan, "The SED Tries to Reassert Itself," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/199 (German Democratic Republic), 27 October 1989, p. 3.

From the beginning of November, the SED was in a state of disarray. The easiest concession it seemed the SED could make was the removal of top officials, who had been associated with the Honecker regime. The first of these officials was the infamous Margot Honecker, still serving as Minister of Education. The ouster of Harry Tisch, head of the official trade union (the FDGB), was followed shortly by the resignation of half of the SED Politbureau on November 3. Meanwhile, the protests reached a high point on November 4, when nearly one million people packed the Alexanderplatz in the center of East Berlin for a rally that remarkably was broadcast on East German television. Stefan Heym, whose remarks on the 1953 uprising have been cited earlier in this study, was a speaker at the rally saying, "We have emerged from our silence, and we are learning to walk, heads high, after bowing before the Kaiser, the Nazis, and what came later."¹⁰⁰

The Krenz government attempted to appease the protester's demands for the easing of travel restrictions by proposing a new draft travel law. This move fell short of the people's expectations on many counts, ". . . including the permitted length of stay in the West (30 days) and the stipulation that a month was needed to process each application."¹⁰¹ On November 7, the entire cabinet of the East German government quit. One day later, on November 8, The Central Committee of the

¹⁰⁰Mort Rosenbloom, *Moments of Revolution*, (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1990), p. 30.

¹⁰¹Barbara Donovan, "The Berlin Wall Comes Tumbling Down," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report/205 (German Democratic Republic), 20 November 1989, p. 3.

Communist Party confirmed Krenz as General Secretary and recommended that Hans Modrow, Mayor of Dresden, be elected the new Prime Minister of East Germany. By now the destruction of the old SED was effectively complete. All that remained of the old guard was an embarrassed shell of the Party and the hideous cement wall they had created. Both would be dealt with in turn.

IX

"The Year was 1989. The Wall was coming down. All along its hideous 165 kilometres East and West Berliners were pouring out to dismantle it. . . Canny merchants were weaving through the crowd selling souvenir bricks." From a visionary article by James P. O'Donnell published in Reader's Digest in 1979.

November 9, 1989:

The Wall Comes Tumbling Down

The period between November 9 and 12, 1989 in the GDR, held events that would lead to the dismantling of the central symbol of the Cold War: The Berlin Wall. The evening of November 9 is one that particularly defies explanation and seems a mysteriously unpredictable, yet fitting conclusion to the efforts of the masses in the GDR during 1988-1989. On that evening, the East German government was in a state of complete disarray. Indeed for all practical purposes, there was no East German government; The entire ministry had just resigned, and ". . . the caretaker administration under Willi Stoph was feuding with the caretakers of the Communist Party, who had just engineered the collective resignation of the Politburo." At the same time the East German Parliament was attempting to draft a new travel law to replace the one rejected by the protesters just days earlier.

In the midst of this crisis, the Party's spokesman, Günter Schabowski, was attempting to make it appear to the West that the GDR government was still functioning. Toward the end of a press conference for Western reporters the question of travel restrictions was raised, as was usually the case. Schabowski, ever trying to keep up the air of Party control, made an off the cuff remark that, "East Germans could travel to the West without the usual elaborate restrictions on visas."¹⁰² None of the reporters present took the statement as meaning very much. However, this was not the case back on the other side of the Wall. One version of the events in the GDR, was recorded by journalist Robert Darnton:

East Berliners began arriving in such numbers at the border that the guards finally let them through. . . The crowd at the border insisted that the government had decreed the opening of the Wall. "How do you know?" asked a guard. "We saw it on television," came the reply. "In that case," said the guard, "you can cross over."¹⁰³

Even more remarkable were the words of Schabowski when he later confided, "The border guards had received no instructions. My announcement came before the Central Committee had a chance to pass the ruling. The guards were just overwhelmed by the masses."¹⁰⁴ It is ironic that the SED, who had held their finger in the dike that was the Wall for so long, would lose control of it due to the loose tongue of a Party member. Although, the symbolic "falling" of the Wall

¹⁰²Darnton, p. 11.

¹⁰³Darnton, pp. 12-13.

¹⁰⁴Tony Paterson, "How a Trickle Turned into a Flood," *The European*, 9-11 November, 1990, p. 3.

was perhaps inevitable because the opposition movement had essentially achieved their critical mass, it was appropriate in the long struggle for freedom in the GDR, that the people, and not the Party, should determine the moment the Wall would fall. The East German Defense Minister ordered the army to seal the Wall two days later, but the army would not cooperate, fearing such action would lead to bloodshed.¹⁰⁵

The events of the days following November 9, serve to illustrate the characteristics of the independent opposition movement in the GDR in its fully matured state. Those involved in the opposition movement who had stayed to the very end and had not fled to the West, had a very distinct set of wishes for their country. Mainly, they wanted the GDR to be *their* country. The subsequent ravaging of Stasi and SED files that took place, was a clear sign that the citizens wanted to morally cleanse the GDR of Stalinism and the likes of Honecker.

As they poured over the documents, the people soon found their own names and those of their neighbors who had reported on them. There were revelations about Volvos, and saunas and hunting lodges appropriated by Honecker and other Party leaders for themselves. Ultimately the citizen's hatred of the SED regime

¹⁰⁵Reuter News Agency, "Army Reluctance Prevented Reclosing of Berlin Wall," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 10 July 1990, p. A10.

became complete as they learned of the ". . . ultimate betrayal of socialism by an elite that had demanded sacrifices so that socialism could prevail."¹⁰⁶

The remaining days of November would see the SED finally lose its monopoly of power. This was forced by the continued voice of the many dissidents who took to the streets at every opportunity. In the interim, more than five million East Germans visited West Germany and less than 1% of them stayed in the FRG. They returned to finish the changes that they had started. Because of the unyielding pressure on the SED to answer for the atrocities being found in the Party files, Egon Krenz, the Politburo, and the Central Committee finally resigned on December 3, 1989.

¹⁰⁶Allen, p. 188. See also Darnton, p. 13.

X

The Western Influence

Having examined the nature and causes of the revolutionary climax in the GDR during autumn and winter of 1988-1989, it is now possible to assess the role that American foreign policy played in these monumental events. The decade of the 1980's saw great, and sometimes frequent changes in the relationship between the US and the USSR. Often the impacts of these stormy Cold War relations between the two countries had far-reaching impacts around the world. The policies of the Reagan Administration represented a fundamental change in the direction of US domestic and foreign policy. These policies provided a sharp contrast to any of Reagan's postwar predecessors and their impacts continued into the Bush Administration.

On the international scene, Ronald Reagan wanted to ". . . recapture the leadership that the United States had enjoyed before the Vietnam War and the Iranian hostage crisis" of the late 1970's. With this in mind he hoped to rebuild declining American military power and ". . . recapture world leadership from the Soviet Union."¹⁰⁷ In order to do this the Reagan Administration adopted a policy of confrontation to meet the challenges posed by what the President called "the Evil

¹⁰⁷Robert A. Divine, *Since 1945: Politics and Diplomacy in Recent American History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 234.

Empire." For the Soviet Union, no longer truly competitive ideologically and falling further behind technologically, ". . . the proclaimed 'inevitable triumph of socialism' had been harrowed to the national attainment of clear-cut and politically decisive military superiority."¹⁰⁸ Reagan clearly felt that a policy of confrontation based on the revitalization of American military power was the only way to "sweep Communism into the ash heap of history."¹⁰⁹

As the tough talk of the President began to be heard throughout the world, those in Europe were concerned with one overriding issue: Did America have the will and the resources to stand up to the Soviet threat? By the end of Reagan's tenure as President in 1988, that answer would prove to be a definitive "yes." A brief examination of the specifics of the Reagan era foreign policy will show that consistency, determination, and a great deal of luck caused the American foreign policy of the 1980's to have a very positive impact on the cause of freedom in the GDR.

INF: Forcing the "Special Relationship"

As we have seen earlier, the desire for the reunification of Germany was not the primary desire in the hearts of many of the activists within the GDR. Many simply wanted to change the nature of East Germany while maintaining a separate

¹⁰⁸Zbigniew Brzezinski, "My Game Plan for the US," *US News and World Report*, 30 June 1986, p. 32.

¹⁰⁹Arch Puddington, "Voices in the Wilderness: The Western Heroes of Eastern Europe," *The Heritage Foundation Policy Review*, No. 53, Summer 1990, p. 34.

independent state. As has also been shown, many of the activists were simply acting because they were concerned by the ecological effects of a militaristic governmental policy that saw the creation of excess heavy industry and the deployment of nuclear weapons. These interests were also supported by many in West Germany who felt the same way about their government and its response to American wishes to expand its use of German soil as a staging ground for the Cold War. This common interest between people and governments of the two German states would serve to forge what many have called a "special relationship" between the two states, despite the fact that they were members of opposing ideological camps. One analyst summed up the awkward relationship:

Both [German states] were not only depositories of Cold War orthodoxies, but were explicitly revisionist states claiming to speak on behalf of a single German nation and committed to national reunification. It was this dual conflict, systemic and national, that initially gave the political elites in both German states a claim to domestic legitimacy, a sense of international purpose, in short, their *raison d'etre*.¹¹⁰

It was this same international system that had earlier precluded any meaningful relations between the two German states, that would eventually cause them to strengthen ties among themselves in order to foster stability in Europe. This stability was necessary in the wake of very frigid superpower relations in the early 1980's.

¹¹⁰Ronald D. Asmus, "Bonn and East Berlin: The 'New' German Question?" *The Washington Quarterly* (Cambridge: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1986), p. 46.

The decision by the Reagan administration to start the INF deployment in Western Europe in November 1983 led to a breakdown in US-Soviet Relations, as Moscow used the start of deployment as a pretext to break off arms control negotiations. The net effect of this in the German capitals was illustrated when Eric Honecker, speaking at a Central Committee plenum of the Socialist party in late November, claimed the basis of inter-German relations had been altered and that the key task was now to "limit the damage resulting from INF deployment." Honecker also called for the development of a "community of responsibility" between Bonn and East Berlin. This was clear indication that a relationship was forming which was not subject to the previous dictates of Cold War diplomacy.¹¹¹ This was encouraged by the "nebulous" nature of Soviet policy which was made so by the death of Brezhnev and Andropov, and the onset of the Chernenko Administration.

The catalyst of INF deployment had indeed forged a somewhat tenuous, but certainly new bond between the two Germanys. Soviet displeasure with Bonn's willingness to proceed with deployment despite Soviet threats, resulted in the Soviet walkout from INF negotiations in November 1983. By forcing the Soviet Union to react to the INF deployment, Reagan had shown that American confrontation policy could credibly influence Soviet action in Europe, thereby inadvertently nurturing the creation of a German-German détente.

¹¹¹Asmus, p. 48.

By December of 1987, the scene had changed dramatically. Reagan was feeling pressure on the domestic front to pursue a more active arms reduction policy. As a result of the Reykjavik summit (October 1986) between Gorbachev and Reagan, and the signing of the INF treaty (December 1987), there was a general erosion in the security consensus in Europe. As a result there were strains placed on the relationship between the US and West Germany because of the increased dependence on tactical nuclear weapons created by the INF treaty. This growing fissure between the US and West Germany created an opening for Moscow to increase ties with the Federal Republic, particularly in the needed economic sphere.¹¹²

Embraceable Gorbachev

In assessing the merits of American foreign policy in relation to the successful revolution in the GDR, it seems necessary to qualify nearly every laudatory remark with the realization that Gorbachev had an immeasurable impact on creating the environment in which every American foreign policy decision was made. In early 1986 as the Gorbachev era was beginning, the first signs of reassessment of a Soviet position toward the Germanys began to appear. These signs became more distinct when West German Foreign Minister Genscher visited

¹¹²F. Stephen Larrabee, "Soviet Policy Toward Germany: New Thinking and Old Realities," *The Washington Quarterly* (Cambridge: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1989), p. 30.

Moscow in July 1986. Gorbachev offered to "open a new page in relations" and the two men signed an agreement on scientific and technological cooperation.¹¹³

The obvious relaxation of tension between the Soviet Union and German interaction allowed for a visit by Honecker to Bonn in 1987. Both Honecker and Gorbachev realized that this could prove very useful in providing East Germany with a number of economic advantages, especially credits, at a time when constraints were growing on Soviet resources and Moscow's ability to supply such credits. A continued improving of inter-German relations also proved useful in providing a means of important technology transfer for the much-needed modernization of Soviet industry.¹¹⁴

Gorbachev continued to make overtures with which the US could not disagree. In an almost philosophical address to the United Nations on December 8, 1988, Gorbachev essentially said that closed societies were no longer possible when he stated, "Freedom of choice is a universal principle. It knows no exceptions."¹¹⁵ It was rhetoric such as this that allowed the Reagan Administration to take part in "confidence building measures", verified arms reductions, and mutually observed military maneuvers. By embracing Gorbachev, the US was able to take advantage of the critical fact that much of his support came from the Soviet

¹¹³Larrabee, p. 35.

¹¹⁴Larrabee, p. 36.

¹¹⁵James M. Markham, "The East-West Flow of People and Ideas," *The New York Times*, 5 February 1989, late ed.: Section 4, pg. 5.

intelligentsia, the ". . . only social group in Soviet society on whose allegiance Gorbachev [could] count." This intelligentsia was the same one that became demoralized, cynical, and actively oppositional after the brutal Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.¹¹⁶ For the US, whose foreign policy had always claimed that human rights and freedom of the individual were somehow at the heart of its actions, it was clearly of interest to embrace the radical Soviet leader.

The Policy of Differentiation

The Reagan Administration in its first term, despite its hostile rhetoric toward the USSR, pursued a policy of differentiation. This policy, as it evolved came to rest on several assumptions: ". . . that each nation of Eastern Europe, because of differing culture, history, ethnic composition and geography, seeks to be different from the Soviet Union and from its neighbors in the pursuit of its national interests." Moreover, in each of these nations, it was recognized that the ruling elites had some degree of independence from Soviet wishes that could be influenced by US foreign policy. Finally, it was assumed that aggressive Western policies could be used to provide incentives for these independent ruling elites to carry out their own individual reforms, regardless of the opinion held in Moscow.

¹¹⁶Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Crafting a U.S. Response to an Eastern Europe in Turmoil," *The Heritage Foundation Report*, Backgrounders; No. 669, 31 August 1988, p. 12.

This policy was articulated in its basic formulation by Vice President George Bush in a 1983 speech in Vienna.¹¹⁷

Through the policy of differentiation, the US was able to use foreign policy actions as tools to influence the independent governments within Eastern Europe. One example of these policy tools was the most-favored-nation trade status with the US. This status was used ". . . to reward political relaxation and a more tolerant human rights policy in Eastern Europe."¹¹⁸ As a practical tool the trade status was used by the US to encourage regimes that were showing interest in any type of reform, be it economic or another form, to also pursue political reforms and allow for the free expression of dissent.

Naturally, the debate over differentiation was waged in the US Congress, but on the whole, the dialogue serves to show that US policy was fully committed to the possibilities created by this type of action with regard to Eastern Europe. The Hon. Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) summed up the general direction of thought in Congress in the following manner:

There are three major constraints on Washington's ability to exert influence in Eastern Europe. The first is the attitude of the East European leaderships toward reform. The second is that, although all East European regimes share a general desire for expanded contacts with the West, they do not share this desire to the same

¹¹⁷William H. Luers, *The U.S. and Eastern Europe* (Washington D.C.: The Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., 1987), p. 980.

¹¹⁸Tismaneanu, p. 15.

degree. The third consideration is Soviet skittishness about ties between East European countries and the West.

Hoyer continued on to say, "Ranking East European countries and minimizing US contacts with countries that scored poorly" should be included in a policy that, ". . . should sustain and develop contacts with official and unofficial segments of all these countries in the hopes of influencing change."¹¹⁹

One of the best things that can be said about US foreign policy toward Eastern Europe in the 1980's is that the promises made by the US in its policy of differentiation, were for the most part kept. Providing a strong signal to the dissident groups in East Germany that their efforts to reform their country would not go unnoticed, was the extension of most-favored-nation status to Hungary in October 1989. President Bush made these remarks at the signing ceremony:

In Budapest I said that as soon as the Hungarian Parliament passed emigration legislation then under consideration, that I would notify our Congress that Hungary meets all the emigration criteria under US law. That would qualify Hungary for most favored nation treatment. And I am pleased to say that on September 26th Hungary fulfilled its part of the bargain. And I am here today to fulfill our part of the bargain.¹²⁰

For the dissidents who were taking to the streets in the GDR, this could only have been a vote of confidence that if they were successful in their efforts, the West, and

¹¹⁹Steny H. Hoyer, "Liberty and U.S. Foreign Policy," *The Washington Quarterly* (Cambridge: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1989), p. 171.

¹²⁰George Bush, address, Granting Hungary Most Favored Nation Status, White House, Washington D.C., 26 October 1989.

particularly the US, would take actions to ensure their economic survival as they emerged from under the Soviet umbrella.

The confrontationist policy of the Reagan Administration followed by a relaxation of tensions in reaction to positive moves by Gorbachev helped US foreign policy to play a complementary role, even though at times inadvertent, in the cause of freedom Eastern Europe. Reagan's tough stand against the Soviet Union served to strengthen the resolve of dissidents, whose activist groups were still in the critical stages of formation. The US influence can be seen in other areas such as Poland and Hungary, which are beyond the scope of this study though they are equally as important as the East German case. The role played by the Bush Administration was essentially one of continuity and consistency of action. In the already disintegrating political environment of Eastern Europe that was inherited by the Bush Administration, a continuation of Reagan's policies was perhaps the best that could be expected. Fortunately for Bush this continuation, though not scoring his Administration any points for originality, maintained the steady American appearance that was needed as the Cold War world was unraveling.

XI

Conclusion/Summary

The revolutionary events of 1988-1989 in the GDR offer a sharp contrast to those of the uprising in June 1953. The two most prominent differences can be found in the following areas. The first area concerns the degree of organization that the dissident movements within the GDR had at the time that each of these civil actions took place. Having analyzed the events leading up to the events of 1953 and 1988-1989, it becomes apparent that by 1988 the independent opposition within the GDR was far more organized than it was in the earlier case. As a result, the general views and desires of the opposition movement were far more widely held and supported than the relatively spontaneous demands of the 1953 uprising. The net effect of this was that in the later case the tide of unrest eventually reached, and was able to sustain epic proportions that the communist government found impossible to stop.

The second area showing a major difference between the 1953 uprising and the revolution of 1988-1989, concerns the influence of American foreign policy in shaping the events within the GDR. In contrast with the earlier case, which demonstrated the anemic nature of American foreign policy in the initial stages of the Cold War, the policies of the US prior to, and during the recent revolution,

proved to be flexible, far-sighted and generally complementary to independent efforts for freedom. The confrontation policies of the Reagan era were much more strongly supported by action than the liberation rhetoric of the Eisenhower Administration proved to be. This fact, particularly in light of the differences apparent after having compared the nature and outcomes of the two most important rebellions in the GDR, seems to suggest several lessons for American policy makers.

The first lesson is that the US can not ever escape the widely accepted, conveniently denied fact that it is the lighthouse of individual freedom throughout the world. The oppressed peoples look to America to see a blueprint for the way their own nations could become. The United States must be constantly aware of the image they project. They must also realize the profound effect that the direction, intensity and most importantly, the consistency with which they illuminate the World with their light of words and actions, has on the success of freedom movements.

The second lesson which can be learned from the events in the GDR stems from the powerful effect that a hard-line stance against aggression can have. By raising the consequences of conflict and oppression, the US has the ability to induce previously hostile states into cooperation. This was illustrated by the "special relationship" formed between the opposing countries of the FRG and GDR

in response to the US's escalation of the US-Soviet arms race in Europe. Though, this particular type of action may not be recommended for the future of our planet, it does show the coercive power of US power projection.

These are but two of the many possible lessons to be learned from the events in the GDR. In closing, it seems there is one critical point that remains to be recognized. The uprising of 1953 and the revolution of 1989 in the GDR represent a triumph of the human spirit over tyranny and oppression. Because of this, they will serve as an inspiration for freedom loving people everywhere. The fact that the GDR is finally free after the blood sweat and tears of its dreamers was shed for a tragically long period, just serves to remind us the tragic irony of oppression about which Bertold Brecht spoke:

Die Nacht hat zwölf Stunden, dann kommt schon der Tag.
 Es wechseln die Zeiten. Die riesigen Pläne
 Der Mächtigen kommen am Ende zum Halt. . . .
 Es wechseln die Zeiten, da hilft kein Gewalt.¹²¹

(The night has twelve hours, and then comes the day.
 Times change. The great plans of the powerful come in the end to a
 halt. . . . No force can stop it.)

¹²¹Bertolt Brecht, "Das Lied von der Moldau," in *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Suhrkamp ed., 1976), p. 187.

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